

THE SUFI MYTH

RASHID SHAZ



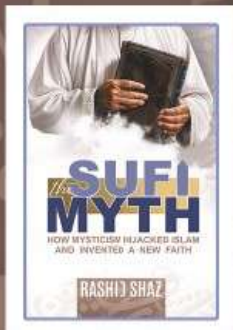
# *the* SUFI MYTH

HOW MYSTICISM HIJACKED ISLAM  
AND INVENTED A NEW FAITH

RASHID SHAZ



# the **SUFI** **MYTH**



Rashid Shaz's *The Sufi Myth* is not just another book; it's a grenade thrown into the middle of comfortable, well-worn beliefs. With the kind of relentless insight that leaves no sacred cow unscathed, Shaz rips through the ornate veil of Sufism to expose the raw, unvarnished truth. This isn't a gentle critique—it's a full-throttle assault on the mystical fabrications that have twisted Islam's pure essence into something almost unrecognizable. If you've ever thought you had a grasp on what Islam is, brace yourself—this book will shake you up, strip away your certainties, and leave you questioning everything you thought you knew.

**Rashid Shaz** is a force of nature in the world of Islamic thought, renowned for his reformist writing, audacious ideas, and relentless activism. As the mind behind Idrak, his magnum opus, he has sparked a dynamic tradition of re-reading the Quran, daring to seek fresh answers for our times. From his youthful days founding the Milli Parliament to steering Milli Times International and the provocative online journal Future Islam, Rashid Shaz has been a relentless advocate for shaking up the stagnant Muslim mindset. He carved out a special course at Aligarh Muslim University, dedicated to nurturing a new generation of scholars—ulema and aalimat—continuing his tireless mission to inspire change. Now, as he navigates the autumn of his life, Shaz pours his energy into writing, reflecting, and mentoring the next wave of young leaders. He helms Peace India International, a bold not-for-profit based in New Delhi, and lends his voice as an ICESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

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and Invented a New Faith

Rashid Shaz



Peace India International  
New Delhi

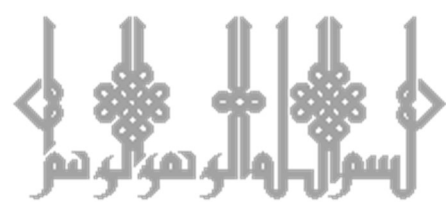
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وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا  
حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

*They conjured up monasticism, a practice we never ordained, all in a desperate bid to please Allah. Yet, they faltered, never quite living up to the ideals they themselves crafted. Still, for those who held firm in their faith, we gave them their due reward, but far too many veered off course, lost in their defiance.*

(Quran, 57:27)



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## Preface

It's almost heretical to suggest that, beyond the Quran and the uninterrupted Sunnah, there's a third source of Islam—a mystical hotline to heaven claimed by the so-called pious. This blasphemy, elegantly dressed up as Sufism, has somehow become an accepted narrative. Take Ahmad Sirhindi, hyperbolically crowned as Mujaddid Alf Thani, the "Reviver of Islam in the Second Millennium." He audaciously states:

the Sharia rulings (احكام شرعى) are based on the four established sources of Islamic jurisprudence (ادلة اربعة), where inspiration (الهام) has no place. However, beyond these rulings, there exist many religious matters where inspiration is considered a fifth source of guidance. Indeed, one might even argue that inspiration is the third source after the Quran and Sunnah, and this principle will endure until the end of time. (*Makateeb*, Vol. 2, p. 55)

But Sirhindi isn't alone in this dangerous narrative. From Abdul Qadir Jilani, almost worshipped as Ghauth Azam (the greatest helper), to Ibn Arabi, the so-called Shaikh al-Akbar (the greatest elder), and down to Shah Waliullah, there's a parade of revered Muslims whose so-called divine visions have seeped into and tainted the pure message of Islam. Their influence is woven into the endless litany of prayers, rituals, and spiritual exercises—from the bizarre *Salatul Makoos* to the intricate *Salat Ghauthia*—all supposedly rooted in this mystical connection to God.

While the Shia tradition waits in suspended animation for their hidden Imam, Sufi masters have craftily claimed a continuous divine link, labeling it Ilham. Much like the Ismaili tradition's Hazar Imam, who is exalted as the Light of God on earth with the audacity to suspend Sharia for his followers, Sufi sheikhs have carved out their domain, controlling the destinies of their disciples. Elevated to demi-god status, these Sheikhs are seen as the ultimate divine intermediaries, holding the keys to their followers' fates in this life and the next. Mainstream ulema texts overflow

with ludicrous, almost polytheistic stories that place these Sufi figures just shy of divinity itself. And somehow, this twisted version of Islam has been embraced as orthodox.

From Malaysia to Morocco, from India to Turkey, and now in the new Muslim enclaves of Europe and America, Sufism has embedded itself so deeply that this corrupted model of Islam has been mistaken for the true path. Visualizing Islam without the distorted lens of Sufi infiltration seems almost impossible. Even revivalist movements like Tablighi Jamaat and the venerable seminaries of Deoband and Nadwa quietly push an Islam that owes more to the tamperings of their Sufi mentors than to the pure, untouched message of the Quran and the Prophet.

This isn't just a spiritual misstep—it's a grand heist, a robbery in broad daylight, and the worst part is that most Muslims are utterly oblivious to it. Even among the devout Sufi followers, there's a tragic ignorance of how, in their desperate bid to connect with the divine through their spiritual leaders and mystical chains, and in their overwhelming love of the Prophet, they've strayed onto a path that's miles away from the Quran and its teachings.

It's almost tragicomic that the Ummah of the final Prophet, with the Quran right in their grasp, has come to place their faith in the hallucinations and delusions of men who are, at the end of the day, just like them. These so-called spiritual mentors, in the guise of empowering souls, have shackled the minds, spirits, and destinies of millions.

This book is here to uncover just how deeply this spiritual trap has ensnared the Ummah and how a cast of sect leaders, Sufi Sheikhs, and self-styled religious seers—whether cloaked in modernity or draped in medieval garb—have turned Islam's two-billion-strong community into a compliant, unquestioning herd. As you turn these pages, prepare to have your eyes opened, your mind liberated, and your connection to the true, untainted message of Islam rediscovered.

— Rashid Shaz



## Faith versus Mysticism

### *When Esoteric Sciences Ascend and Divine Revelation Fades into the Background*

The Prophet Muhammad wasn't a Sufi, and he didn't set out to create a band of mystics. In the raw, unfiltered beginnings of Islam, there's no sign of anyone searching for meanings beyond divine revelation or piecing together a life through chants and rituals. Sufism is the outsider, the gatecrasher, an import born from an obsession with faith that twisted the religion's core. The rise of Sufism in Islam wasn't just bold—it was brazen, demanding the cold resolve of a heart turned to stone and the sly cunning of a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The Quran tells us about a God who wears His names and attributes like a second skin—a God who, despite His endless vastness, can still fit into the narrow confines of human understanding. The bond between God and His creation is like a bridge stretched across the abyss between the finite and the infinite. This is the God who, through revelation, stepped into the realm of human perception, offering an experience that was open to everyone, no matter their capacity. It called for a form of worship that was simple, accessible, and profound—clear, unmistakable guidance that came in the form of divine revelation. Stripped of the usual barriers of race, language, region, or culture, this timeless document was a beacon for anyone willing to light their way. And the verse {إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ {اللهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ} — "Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" — sent out a clarion call, inviting all to bask in the light of this divine wisdom.

There's no question that the human mind can't handle the true, unfiltered essence of God. A being that exists outside the boundaries of time and space, infinite in every direction, is beyond the grasp of those trapped within those confines. But our minds can stretch as far as God allows, within the limits He set in the Quran and earlier revelations, knowing how fragile and limited our hearts and intellects are. Verses like {هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ}—"He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden"—lay out the maximum capacity of our understanding, forcing us to perceive God only through His names and attributes. As the verse says, {لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا}—"To Him belong the most beautiful names, so call upon Him by them," and {وَلَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَمَ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ}—"If the sea were ink for writing the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted" (Al-Kahf: 109). Sufism dared to push beyond this, claiming that understanding God through these names and attributes barely scratches the surface of His true essence. How can a being with no beginning or end, infinite in every direction, be neatly captured by mere words? Jewish mystics held fast to the belief that the true God is an elusive, hidden presence, one too mysterious for words to capture. Muslim Sufis latched onto this idea, setting their sights on uncovering this enigmatic force. To many ordinary Muslims, this pursuit seemed to offer a depth and intensity that regular faith couldn't touch, feeding the notion that Sufis were a group of the spiritually elite—those who sought a higher plane of existence, a level of spirituality reserved for the chosen few. But the Sufis didn't stop at just finding this hidden being; they went further, chasing after the divine secrets that, in their view, held the keys to manipulating the very fabric of the universe.

In Jewish texts, the idea that God created the universe out of nothing wasn't new. The Quran itself speaks of God's absolute power with the phrase {كُنْ فَيَكُونُ}—"Be, and it is." This idea became an obsession for those chasing after divine secrets, especially the word {كُنْ}. They figured that if

God could summon an entire universe into existence with just this word, then surely there's a hidden power within it. And why stop at {كن}? If humans could tap into the secrets of letters like God does, who knows how many new worlds they could conjure. Sufis took this Quranic portrayal of God's omnipotence and spun it into something resembling a mystical, almost occult practice, where words and chants could bend reality itself. Influenced by Vedantic philosophy, some Sufi groups believed the world was nothing but an illusion, a mere shadow, and what we see isn't the true reality. This idea was only bolstered by the thought that this whole illusion, this world we think we know, exists simply because of the word {كن}. As time went on, the secrets of letters morphed into entire fields of study. Sciences like *Ilm al-Jafr*, *Ilm al-Adaad*, astrology, and geomancy were given a veneer of Quranic legitimacy, turning what were once random superstitions into supposed spiritual sciences. The imagined discovery of divine secrets embedded in these practices cemented Quranic symbols, talismans, and mystical scripts into the fabric of Islamic life.

This obsession with uncovering hidden meanings and divine mysteries led to the dismissal of the Quran's practical guidance. Even the most learned scholars weren't safe from this intellectual drift, convincing themselves that the real essence of the Quran was hidden in its allegorical verses, while the clear, straightforward ones were nothing more than a shell.<sup>1</sup> The Muslim community was left clinging to the Quran, but it was now seen by many as an empty vessel of words, its true meanings siphoned off by the Sufis. As the loudmouthed Jalaluddin Rumi bluntly put it, "The bones were left for the dogs."<sup>2</sup>

The rise of Sufism in Islam was like the birth of a whole new religion. It was a replay of what the Jews had done with the Torah—dismantling the original revelation and replacing it with something else. This new spiritual path couldn't emerge without pushing aside or freezing the divine revelation in its tracks. The Sufis didn't just stop at uncovering hidden meanings; they reshaped Quranic terms, layering them with

interpretations that locked the Quran behind a wall of foreign concepts. These mystical reinterpretations burrowed so deep into religious thought that even those who opposed Sufism couldn't escape their influence—every explanation, no matter how orthodox, carried the weight of these Sufi-influenced meanings.

## 2

# Chasing the Hidden Meanings

What better way to sideline divine revelation and lock its meanings behind a gate than by filling it with mysterious, hidden interpretations? This clever move made it easy for readers to see whatever they wanted in the Quran's verses, molding sacred texts to fit their own desires. The Sufis were quick to declare that "إِنَّ الْفُرْعَانَ ظَاهِرًا وَبَاطِنًا وَالْمُرَادُ بَاطِنُهُ"—"the Quran has an outer and an inner meaning, and it's the inner meaning that really matters."<sup>3</sup> To back this up, they even came up with a fabricated Hadith, supposedly from the Prophet (PBUH), claiming, "وما من آية إلا ولها ظاهرٌ و باطنٌ"—"There's no verse in the Quran that doesn't have both an outer and an inner meaning, each with its own secret key. And then there was the idea that while the door to Prophethood is closed, the door to understanding remains wide open. Some even attributed to Hazrat Ali (RA) the notion that now that revelation has ended, all we have left is our interpretation of the Quran, and that God grants understanding of the Quran to whomever He chooses.<sup>4</sup> With this mystical interpretation in hand, Sufis and other spiritual seekers were given free rein to twist and shape the Quran's teachings to suit their own visions.

There's a story attributed to Abdullah ibn Abbas where he supposedly said, "If I were to explain the verse {اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ...}—'Allah is the one who created seven heavens and the earth like them...' (Surah At-Talaq: 12), you'd either stone me or call me a heretic."<sup>5</sup> And then there's the Hadith Bukhari reports from Abu Hurairah, who claimed, "The Prophet handed me two vessels of knowledge. One I've shared with everyone, but if I were to open the other, they'd slit my throat."<sup>6</sup> These kinds of stories fueled the idea that the Quran is more than just the words on the page—it's a vault of secrets and mysteries that only esoteric knowledge can unlock. And the word on the street was that

this hidden knowledge wasn't just for anyone; it was first passed down by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to his inner circle, with Ali (RA) and Abu Bakr (RA) often singled out as the primary keepers of this sacred insight. The Sufis spun the idea of "Ilm Ladunni"—a divine, mystical knowledge—into a tale woven around the legendary figure of Khidr.<sup>7</sup> In their eyes, the {عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا}—"servant from among Our servants"—mentioned in the Quranic story of Moses, who holds prophetic wisdom, is none other than Khidr himself. Ali (RA) also became a central figure in this esoteric narrative. But the myth around Khidr grew so powerful that people started to believe he had direct connections with spiritual seekers across different ages. Tales of mystics receiving divine blessings straight from Khidr became the stuff of legend. It got to the point where even the most outwardly pious scholars, those who loudly proclaimed their mission to revive the faith, felt the need to tie their spiritual credentials to Ali (RA) if not to Khidr himself, to give their teachings a stamp of mystical legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> The murky waters stirred up by esoteric knowledge, or "Ilm Ladunni," didn't just give some Shia groups the room to carve out a new religious path—it also pulled Sunni Sufis into the mix, eager to tap into these mystical insights. Once the notion took hold that "knowledge, the Quran, and the Hadith all have outer and inner meanings"<sup>9</sup>—it was only a matter of time before an intense fascination with uncovering this hidden Quran and secret Hadith became the natural next step.

Esoteric interpretation gave Sufis the green light to project their own ideas onto the Quran, twisting its verses into vessels for concepts that were entirely foreign to the text. Take the verse {مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نَعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا}—"From it (the earth) We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out once again." Some read this as an endorsement of "Wahdat al-Wujud," the philosophy of the unity of existence, suggesting that we all emerge from the Divine Oneness, dissolve back into it, and then reappear.<sup>10</sup> Even in the simple



phrase {الحمد لله}—"All praise is due to Allah," the mystic Ibn Arabi found a declaration of existential philosophy. For him, {الحمد لله} wasn't just praise; it was an all-encompassing statement where God is both the one who praises and the one who is praised, the worshiper and the worshipped, the alpha and the omega.<sup>11</sup> Through their esoteric interpretations, Sufis twisted the Quran to legitimize their own intellectual wanderings and mental inventions. Take the verse in Surah Al-Baqarah, {فاذكروه كما هداكم}—"Remember Him as He has guided you." The Sufis read this as a nod to a form of dhikr that was entirely their own creation, claiming it referenced six distinct types: the remembrance of the self, the heart, the secret, the soul, the hidden, and the essence.<sup>12</sup> In the same way, the final verses of Surah Al-Baqarah were twisted to fit an existential narrative. The phrase {اغفرانك ربنا وإليك المصير}—"Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is our return"—was reinterpreted to mean, "O Lord, forgive us our existence and attributes, erase them into Your existence and attributes"—(اغفر لنا وجوداتنا وصفاتنا وامحها بوجودك ووجود صفاتك وإليك المصير) بالفناء فيك. This became a plea for God to forgive the ultimate sin—our very existence. Ibn Arabi took it a step further, labeling human existence as the greatest sin of all, explaining it through the metaphor of a lover and beloved. In his view, the lover's most unforgivable sin in the eyes of the beloved is simply that he exists, a transgression unlike any other. And so it is with human existence in relation to God—a sin that can only be absolved by dissolving back into the Divine.<sup>13</sup> In the Sufi worldview, the ultimate sin—our very existence—can only be erased through "Fana fi Allah" or "Fana fi al-Dhat," the complete annihilation of the self in God. This, they claimed, was the real "greater jihad" (jihad-e-akbar). To back up this idea, not only did they fabricate a Hadith—"رجعنا من جهاد الاصغر الى جهاد الاكبر"—"We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad,"<sup>14</sup> but they also twisted Quranic verses on jihad to fit this narrative. Take the verse {يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لُؤْمَةً لَّائِمٍ}—"They strive in the way of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic" (Surah Al-Ma'idah: 54). Ibn

Arabi read it as: "يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِمَحْوِ صِفَاتِهِمْ وَإِفْتَاءِ ذَوَاتِهِمْ الَّتِي هِيَ حُجُبٌ مُشَاهِدَاتِهِمْ" وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةً لَّائِمَةً مِنْ نَسَبَتِهِمْ إِلَى الْإِبَاحَةِ وَالزُّنْدَقَةِ وَالْكُفْرِ وَعَزْلِهِمْ بِتَرْكِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَدَائِهَا بَلْ يَتْرَكُ الْآخِرَةَ<sup>15</sup>—"For the Sufis, the real jihad is erasing their existence and attributes until nothing remains but God, and they don't care if others call them heretics or disbelievers, nor if they're condemned for abandoning the world and its pleasures—or even the hereafter and its rewards." The idea of an outer and inner Quran naturally led to the belief that you can't truly access the soul of the Quran without delving into its hidden meanings. This notion gained even more traction when esteemed scholars insisted that some knowledge is veiled in secrets—secrets that aren't unlocked through ordinary learning, but only through the path of asceticism.<sup>16</sup>

The elevation of esoteric meanings and "Ilm Ladunni" twisted the very essence of Islam into something unrecognizable. It wasn't just that the Quran's ability to convey its message got muddled—suddenly, the Quran became just a skeleton of words, empty of deeper meaning unless the mystics stepped in. The idea that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) passed on hidden teachings to a chosen few cast a shadow of doubt over his mission as a messenger. The advocates of these hidden sciences conveniently ignored the Quranic command to "بلغ ما أنزل إليك"—"proclaim what has been revealed to you," and the emphasis that {إذا ما بلغت الرسالة}—"if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message at all." Sufis took this even further, popularizing a dubious Hadith attributed to Ali (RA), where he supposedly claimed the Prophet taught him seventy chapters of knowledge that no one else was privy to. "أخبرني رسول الله بسبعين باباً من العلم لم<sup>17</sup> يخبر بها أحد غيري".

As time went on, the belief took hold that esoteric knowledge was directly linked to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Ali (RA). But many mystics weren't content with that—they claimed to receive this knowledge through Khidr or even through their own spiritual practices, claiming they had illuminated their hearts with divine light. Abu Talib

al-Makki summed it up, "هَذَا هُوَ الْعِلْمُ النَّافِعُ الَّذِي يَبْنِي الْعَبْدَ وَيَبْنِي اللَّهَ تَعَالَى وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُلْقَاهُ" —<sup>18</sup>"This is the true knowledge that exists between a servant and Allah, the kind that brings one face to face with Him." He went even further, saying, "فَضْلُ الْعِلْمِ الْبَاطِنِ عَلَى الظَّاهِرِ كَفَضْلِ الْمَكْتُوبِ عَلَى الْمَلِكِ" —<sup>19</sup>"The superiority of esoteric knowledge over outward knowledge is like the superiority of the spiritual realm over the material one." And so, as this exaltation of hidden knowledge grew, the importance of outward revelation and its sacred texts began to fade. The idea spread that there are two paths to reach Allah: one laid out by divine revelation and the teachings of prophets, and the other carved out by the inspiration and insights of mystics and saints.<sup>20</sup> When people start believing that saints can chart the path to salvation through their mystical insights and ascetic practices, the need for the Prophet and the central role of the Quran begin to fade. The mystics, armed with their esoteric knowledge, step into the Prophet's shoes, claiming they hold the true key to the Quran's hidden meanings. They even consider themselves more deserving of the Prophet's position, because, as Bayazid Bastami allegedly put it, "أَخَذْتُمْ عِلْمَكُمْ عَنِ الْمَيِّتِ وَأَخَذْنَا عِلْمَنَا" —<sup>21</sup>"You took your knowledge from the dead, but we took ours from the Living One who never dies." These mystics believe that the source of their knowledge is the same as that of the Prophet. As Ibn Arabi said, "فَإِنَّهُ أَخَذَ مِنَ الْمَعْدِنِ الَّذِي يَأْخُذُ مِنْهُ الْمَلِكُ الَّذِي يُؤَلِّي بِهِ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ" —<sup>22</sup>"The saint takes from the same source from which the angel who brings revelation to the Prophet takes." So, it was only a matter of time before Sufism paved the way for the emergence of new forms of prophecy—a natural evolution of their beliefs. When Ibn Arabi said, "حَدَّثَنِي قَلْبِي عَنْ رَبِّي" —<sup>23</sup>"My heart spoke to me from my Lord," or when Shah Waliullah echoed with "أَلْهِمَنِي رَبِّي" —<sup>24</sup>"My Lord inspired me," it was clear that these new would-be prophets saw themselves as having a direct line to God. Sure, they might have claimed their revelations were a step below those of actual prophets, but they still believed they were in on a divine conversation. This esoteric knowledge gave the Sufis a leg up, placing them on a

pedestal even higher than the prophets. It was said that once the mystics' hearts were purified of all impurities, their hearts became like a mirror reflecting the "لوح محفوظ"—the Preserved Tablet.<sup>23</sup> Some even went so far as to claim that what the mystics see in their dreams is the same vision the prophets see in their waking hours.<sup>24</sup>

These self-proclaimed masters of esoteric knowledge didn't just lock down the meanings of the Quran with their own twisted interpretations, turning it into an empty shell for the masses—they took it a step further and started writing their own "Sufi Qurans." The sayings of mystics and the writings of prominent Sufis became the go-to sources for these hidden meanings, embraced as spiritual roadmaps by those on the mystic path. Just like how the books of jurisprudence, with all the legal scholars' debates, had reduced the Quran from a guide to enlightenment into a mere rulebook—and how jurisprudence became the de facto "practical Quran" for religious life—the words of the Sufis turned into the ultimate manuals for spiritual growth. With the belief taking hold that the hidden meanings of the Quran were locked away in the sayings of mystics—truths revealed directly to their hearts—those on the spiritual path lost their pull toward the Quran itself. It was a similar story in Jewish Kabbalistic literature, where it was claimed that the true essence of the Torah was buried in its esoteric meanings. They said the Torah was revealed in seventy voices and sounds, a secret that emerged at Sinai and now manifests the divine attributes through Malkhut within the Sefirot. According to this view, those seeking the ultimate truth shouldn't separate the letters of the Torah, the divine names, and the Tree of Life from each other. If a seeker manages to do this, they'll sense that the divine names, sacred letters, and holy sounds have all fused within their own being.<sup>25</sup>

### 3

## The Book of Guidance or Just a Book of Letters?

The Sufis' obsession with the word {كُن}—"Be"—dragged them into a kind of letter worship when it came to the Quran. Before long, the idea took root that the divine message was really just a collection of letters. Letters became everything—the key to divine secrets, the essence of God's names. The true value wasn't in the meanings of the words but in the letters themselves, where the whole world of meaning supposedly resided. This fixation turned the Quran into a book that was all about the mysterious arrangement of letters, rather than a guide filled with clear teachings. The real meanings of the Quran were no longer found in its words, and its straightforward guidance was pushed aside. The focus shifted entirely to uncovering the secrets of these letters, secrets that, according to the Sufis, were whispered only to a select few mystics by God Himself.

The Quran, once a divine guide, had now been reduced to a mere collection of letters, and the mystics claimed exclusive rights to its secrets. They loudly proclaimed that letters were the heart of spirituality, that the divine message itself was woven from these letters, and that the meanings hidden within them were the true essence of spiritual enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> They even went as far as saying that the verses of mercy in the Quran were like angels of mercy for the deserving, while the verses of punishment were like angels of wrath, bringing misfortune. Dotted letters were considered signs of bad luck, while undotted ones were lucky; a letter with one dot was closer to blessing, two dots were moderate, and three dots marked the greatest misfortune.<sup>27</sup> The Sufis believed that

understanding these hidden secrets of the letters was akin to unlocking the mysteries of the divine. They invited others to read the Quran as a "Book of Letters," urging them to find the mystical properties within its verses.

In the 7th century, thanks to the calculated efforts of Ali al-Buni, Ibn Arabi, and Ibn Talhah al-Adawi, the Quran drifted from its original role as a guide and became, in Sufi circles, a textbook for white magic. Manipulating the universe through Quranic letters was now dubbed "permissible magic" (*mubah sihr*), and these extreme Sufis worked hard to weave their invented secrets into the fabric of traditional Islamic thought. They believed in *Wahdat al-Wujud*—the unity of existence—arguing that all of existence springs from a single source. To them, the hidden forces within the Quranic letters held sway over the universe, and these letters, they claimed, were born from the divine names of Allah. They thought that, with the right mystical insight and extreme caution, one could harness these names to influence the physical world. These notions about the mystical power of letters were borrowed straight from Jewish Kabbalistic literature, but the Sufis claimed they found the roots of this theory in the Quran itself. They positioned the Quran as the ultimate secret code of letters, making it hard to dismiss this foreign idea, no matter how damaging it was. Ibn Arabi went a step further, asserting that he discovered the essence of this theory in the Quran's own words, particularly in {كُنْ}—"Be." Those who saw the Quran as a cryptic collection of letters honed in on the supposed hidden powers within certain letters. The 'Alif' of Allah, likened to the majesty of the Divine Essence, and the 'Meem' of Muhammad became their focal points, drawing the Sufis into an intense fascination with these symbols. They said the power of 'بِسْمِ' comes from the letter 'ميم' (Meem), a letter with a numerical value of 40, representing its ultimate perfection. They pointed to the verse {حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً}—"until he reaches the age of forty"—as proof that the letter 'ميم' symbolizes maturity and



completeness. The belief was that if someone looked at the letter 'ميم' forty times a day, their life would overflow with blessings and good fortune.<sup>28</sup> It was even claimed that 'بسم الله' reaches its full power because of the 'ميم'.<sup>29</sup> Symbols and talismans featuring the letter 'ميم' were crafted, promising success in all endeavors to those who kept them close.<sup>30</sup> And they went even further, claiming that anyone who unlocked even one of the mysteries of the 'ميم' would gain insight into the wonders of the world.<sup>31</sup>

Similar beliefs surrounded other letters too. Take the letter 'ب', which was said to signify "بي ماكان وبى ما يكون"—"With me is what was, and with me is what will be."<sup>32</sup> They believed that writing down the 'ب' from 'بسم الله' and wearing it on your arm would draw down mysterious blessings and the light of angels.<sup>33</sup> The letter 'ه' was wrapped up in prayers that were promised to be answered, with some even crafting prayers like 'اللهم انى'—"O Allah, I ask You by the letter 'ه'." They created cryptic, inexplicable symbols based on 'ه' and touted them as miraculous solutions for the faithful.<sup>34</sup> Then there were the seven letters missing from Surah Al-Fatihah, which sparked all kinds of speculation. These letters, dubbed "سواقط سورة فاتحه"—"the fallen letters of Surah Al-Fatihah"—were believed to be letters of punishment, said to have the power to bring suffering and misfortune to enemies when used correctly.<sup>35</sup>

The mystical properties of letters—whether they were hot or cold, dry or wet, and their numerical significance—were topics of endless debate among the Sufis. But when it came to grounding these esoteric Quranic secrets in legitimacy, they almost all turned to the Alawi family. The belief took hold that the hidden meanings of the Quran, passed down from Ali to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, were filled with secrets capable of revealing the future. A mythical book, "Kitab al-Jafr," was attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, rumored to contain predictions about the future trials and tribulations that would befall the Prophet's family. And from this, the

supposed science of 'Ilm al-Jafr' was said to have its roots in Ja'far al-Sadiq's teachings. The obsession with uncovering the hidden meanings of Quranic letters was a product of foreign influences, making it a tangled, disputed mess. The study of numerology—whether it was the mystical properties of 'Abjad' letters, the 'Asma al-Husna' (the Beautiful Names of Allah), 'Hisaab al-Jummal' (the art of assigning numerical values to letters to keep a name hidden), or 'al-Kasr wa al-Bast' (the practice of combining the letters of a sacred name with another to achieve a specific outcome)—became an intricate web of contradictions. The differing opinions on the numerical values of letters were a clear sign that those searching for hidden truths in the Quran were drawing their inspiration from a hodgepodge of external sources, far removed from the original text. The truth is, these Sufis were deeply influenced by the ancient beliefs of Hindu and Jewish traditions, which were steeped in the mystical powers of letters and numbers, and by the age-old practices of magic and astrology. As a result, the varying alphabetical orders in Jafr al-Kabeer, Jafr al-Sagheer, and Jafr al-Mutawassit shift the numerical values of letters, turning interpretation into an almost impossible maze. The existing numerology system, which groups solar and lunar letters separately, only adds to the confusion, making it hard to reconcile with other Jafr systems. The whole mess is so tangled that even seasoned experts have thrown up their hands, with some, like Hajji Khalifa, conceding that only the awaited Mahdi at the end of times will be able to make sense of it all.<sup>36</sup>

For nearly a thousand years, countless attempts were made to unravel the mysteries of the letters in the Quran, all in pursuit of some divine secret. But the truth is, these efforts never led to any revelation of hidden powers or uncovered the supposed secrets of the universe. From Hallaj onward, there isn't a single documented case that holds up to scrutiny, no instance where a Sufi cracked the code of {كُنْ}—"Be"—and conjured a new world or bent the existing one to their will through the power of these letters. What did happen, though, is that these

relentless efforts sowed confusion among ordinary believers. The Quran, once seen as a straightforward book of guidance, became shrouded in mystique, with people convinced it held the keys to divine secrets. The idea took root that whoever could unlock these secrets wouldn't just find salvation—they could seize control of the universe in the blink of an eye. This shift in perception fundamentally derailed the Quran from its true purpose. Once this aura of mystery set in, the Quran started being used in ways it was never intended for. In places like Turkey and parts of Africa, printed versions of the Quran by Hafiz Osman, with loose sheets, became popular tools for fortune-telling. The Quran, now seen as a manual for divination, was far removed from its original role, reduced to a reference book for mystical practices like Jafr and Wafq.

The supposed secrets of letters and their mystical numbers planted bizarre and confusing beliefs in people's minds. In Sufi circles, the fabricated Hadith Qudsi, "أنا أحمد بلا ميم"—"I am Ahmad without the Meem," gave rise to strange ideas about the divine nature. Some went so far as to claim that the letter 'Alif', the first in "Allah," is composed of three letters 'ا', 'ل', 'ف', with a numerical value of 111 (ا=1, ل=30, ف=80). They argued that this 111 matches the sum of 'ا' (1) in "Allah," 'م' (40) in "Muhammad," and 'ع' (70) in "Ali." Some sects elevated the number 19 to sacred status, believing it confirmed the oneness of God, while others found the number 11 in 'هُوَ' ("He") to encapsulate the grandeur of 'بِسْمِ اللَّهِ'. These numerical interpretations of Quranic verses weren't random; they were the result of centuries of speculation. It all started with Hallaj and his contemporaries, who began decoding the mysteries of the disjointed letters (huruf al-muqatta'at) in the Quran. What began as cryptic hints in his "Kitab al-Tawasin" eventually morphed into a respected field of Quranic knowledge, deeply embedded in mystical tradition.

The supposed numerical powers of Quranic letters gained such traction in Islamic thought that even Ahmad Sirhindi, who dubbed himself the "Mujaddid (Renewer) of the Second Millennium" in the Indian subcontinent, leaned on this numerology to validate his claim. He used this mystical math to argue for his religious authority in the new era, declaring: "محمد احمد شد"—"Muhammad becomes Ahmad."<sup>37</sup>



## The Book of Guidance or a Collection of Quranic Talismans?

The obsession with Quranic letters and their numerical values gave birth to a field of study that clashed head-on with the Quran's core message of monotheism. The Quran is clear: the power to control the universe belongs to God alone. Life and death, benefit and harm—all of it rests solely with the divine. The Quran encourages direct communion between God and the believer, insisting that God is closer to us than our own jugular vein. But those who dug into the supposed secrets of Quranic letters or calculated their numerical significance veered off course, believing that the words of the Quran held hidden powers capable of influencing the world. They took what was meant to be exclusive to God and extended it to the sacred text, or at least included the Quran in that divine power. In the early centuries, theological debates like the "خلق قرآن"—whether the Quran was created or eternal—left an impression that the Quran might be an extension of God's very essence. This kind of intellectual confusion fed into the belief that Quranic letters held mysterious, hidden powers.

Muslims have always held an unshakable belief in the Quran, knowing from day one that it's the word of God. It's a source of pride for every group within the Muslim community. But certain opportunists, recognizing the deep reverence Muslims have for the Quran, have twisted it to serve their own distorted, chaotic ideas. By blending popular astrology and divination, they concocted a complicated system supposedly rooted in Quranic verses that mention stars, planets, and constellations. And because these individuals found a way to project their own mental fixations onto the Quran through esoteric interpretations,

they managed to turn it into a manual for *Ilm Simiyah*—white magic—digging through its verses for hidden powers and mystical properties. Among Jewish priests, it wasn't uncommon to believe that the true meanings of the Torah were tucked away in the Hebrew alphabet. They thought God's all-encompassing knowledge came from His mastery in arranging these letters in a precise order. Kabbalistic mysticism later took this idea even further, claiming that God actually created the universe using these letters. Some went as far as to say that the numbers from one to ten held profound mysteries, with everything depending on how these numbers were manipulated. According to the Kabbalistic take on the Book of Genesis, each letter harbors a hidden power that God used to bring the universe into being. Everything in existence owes itself to the mysterious forces of these letters. They weren't just symbols for communication but keys to spiritual experiences, unlocking visions of divine truth or the ultimate merging with the divine.<sup>38</sup>

The Sufis took the Quran and tried to turn it from a book of guidance into a manual for unlocking the secrets of the universe. Folktales, legends, and unreliable traditions—often fueled by storytellers and certain commentators—had already spread these ideas around certain Surahs. It was said that the *Mu'awwidhatayn* (the last two Surahs) were revealed to break a spell cast on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Some tales claimed that Surah Al-Fatiha could cure a scorpion sting, while others suggested that the Prophet would recite specific verses before bed to shield himself. These stories didn't really fit with the Quran's message, and they certainly didn't hold up under historical scrutiny, but they were repeated so often in commentaries—especially by the likes of Al-Tabari—that even scholars started to believe in them, mistaking myth for reality. In a climate where the belief in Quranic verses holding magical or supernatural powers had practically become gospel, it wasn't a stretch to imagine that beyond the well-known verses, there might be others with hidden abilities capable of accomplishing extraordinary things. The catch was that, unlike the verses traditionally used for protection or magic, there were fewer stories

backing up these other verses, making it tough to convince the public of their supposed powers. The workaround? Attribute these hidden secrets to obscure mystics, claiming that in dreams or moments of divine inspiration, they were shown the true powers of these verses. And, of course, it was advised to keep these secrets from the ignorant—meaning anyone who wouldn't blindly accept these mental concoctions without questioning their alignment with the Quran's actual message.

When the so-called revelations and inspirations of dubious figures gained traction, the Quran was no longer just a book of guidance—it morphed into a manual for astrology, divination, and magical practices. The imagined numerical values of the letters warped the original structure of the Quranic verses, making the actual order of the words meaningless to those who saw the Quran as a source of mystical power.<sup>39</sup> They started assigning numbers to the verses and charting out Surahs as numerical grids. Long Surahs with hundreds of verses were squeezed into tiny boxes of numbers. The belief took hold that simply looking at these charts morning and evening, hanging them on walls, placing them where the sunlight would touch them, wearing them on the arm, or dangling them as amulets around the neck, would be enough to tap into their supposed power. The sacred words of the Almighty were reduced to a mere plaything by those who twisted them with their numerology. Take Surah Maryam, a majestic narrative that once resonated in the hearts of believers, offering a world of guidance for the righteous. Yet, thanks to the meddling of these misguided minds, this powerful Surah was crammed into a three-line numerical grid. They even spun the tale that hanging this grid in a barren garden would make it bloom, all because of the so-called mystical power they claimed it held.<sup>40</sup>

The people who turned the Quran into a numbers game also pushed the idea that the mystical powers they claimed to have uncovered weren't human inventions, nor should they be dismissed as mere magic or sorcery. No, they insisted, these powers were from the higher, spiritual realms, not the earthly ones. This whole division of the universe into

higher and lower realms was their own creation, a way to frame the miracles of Sufis as divine and the feats of non-Muslim ascetics and yogis as mere tricks. Never mind that there was no real difference between them—their so-called spiritual source made all the difference. This line of thinking only fueled the notion that the Quran was a hidden treasure of mysterious meanings and secret powers. It was sold as a book of *Ilm Simiyah*—a mystical guide for controlling the universe, handed down by Allah to the faithful, with only a select few holding the keys to its hidden codes. Astrologers and numerologists tried to ground their made-up science in the Quran by cherry-picking verses. They argued that when Allah says "وكفى بنا حاسبين"—"And sufficient are We as accountants"—it hinted at a hidden connection to numbers. They also pointed to the mysterious letters in Surah Al-'Alaq (Iqra) as proof that letters and numbers were divinely linked. As Al-Buni suggested, letters were considered secondary to numbers, with the divine intellect supposedly unlocked through numerical secrets.<sup>41</sup> First, they hunted for hidden meanings in the Quran's letters, then assigned numerical values to those letters, and eventually swapped the letters for numbers altogether. For example, they claimed the mysterious letters at the start of the first 28 Surahs held powerful secrets, and that arranging them in a certain way could act as a talisman to solve various problems. This created the illusion that the essence of these 28 Surahs had been distilled into a tiny box. Even though the letters in the box seemed random and meaningless, they were believed to hold some deep, mystical connection to the Quran. The letters in this grid were eventually transformed into numbers, with these numerologists claiming that even in the divine scheme, numbers trump letters. This warped the sacred text of the first 28 Surahs into a tiny box—a distortion born entirely from the minds of these misguided individuals. For those chasing the so-called mystical secrets of the Quran, these 28 Surahs were now rendered meaningless. When a small grid could supposedly fulfill all their worldly needs, the need to actually read and reflect on these Surahs vanished. This sheep-like acceptance of such



thinking didn't just sideline the Quran's true role as a guide; it stripped away its intrinsic and eternal significance. The popularity of these grids and talismans turned the Quran into a mere manual for rituals and practices that it was never meant to endorse.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Quran was revealed to negate exactly this kind of superstition.

The real twist is how, through talismans and mystical grids, the Muslim community slipped into a kind of shirk—associating partners with God—that they justified by claiming it was rooted in the Quran itself. Instead of seeking help directly from the Almighty, it became more fashionable to invoke the Asma al-Husna—the Beautiful Names of Allah. The belief took hold that simply reciting these names or calling upon them could fulfill specific needs. The verse {ولله الأسماء الحسنى فادعوه بها}—"To Allah belong the best names, so call upon Him by them"—was twisted from a description of God's attributes into a belief that these names had powers of their own. Some even claimed that Allah Himself relied on these names to wield His influence over the universe. They went so far as to say that God's divinity was tied to the Ism-e-Azam—the Greatest Name—a secret beyond human grasp, revealed only to those whom God chooses to share His power with.

We'll dive deeper into this later, but for now, let's just say that those who turned the Quran into a tool for supernatural manipulation ended up replacing God with the Quranic verses themselves. They began to plead, not to God, but to the imagined mystical powers of these verses, mistaking them for the source of divine help and intervention. The Sufis crafted prayers that elevated God's names to the status of divine power, almost sidelining God Himself. Their prayers began to sound like this: "O Allah, I ask You by Your name through which You opened the knowledge of creation and command..."<sup>43</sup> or "اللهم اني استلک باسمائك کلها الحميدة التي اذا وضعت علي شيء ذل و خضع " or "O Allah, I ask You by all Your praiseworthy names, which, when placed upon something, cause it

to submit and humble, and when goodness is sought through them, it is granted, and when evil is repelled by them, it is banished."<sup>44</sup> It got to the point where the prayers of misguided individuals echoed with phrases like "اللهم اني اسئلك بحق بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم"—"O Allah, I ask You by the right of Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim," as if the names themselves held the power instead of God.

The driving belief behind these prayers was that the names of Allah or the verse Bismillah carried extraordinary power due to their numerical values, making these prayers incredibly potent. Books on talismans and amulets confidently declared that if these prayers were organized with specific references, recited at the right time, in the right way, and with certain ritualistic phrases—often involving some questionable conditions—their effectiveness was guaranteed. The underlying assumption was that since God Himself supposedly uses names, letters, and numbers to manage the universe, how could He possibly ignore prayers armed with these mystical numbers? These prayers were less about genuine supplication and more about declaring God's supposed supernatural powers. The blind faith in the mystical power of numbers and symbols ended up contaminating even the act of prayer with subtle forms of shirk. The Quran's pure concept of monotheism was buried under the weight of these imagined Quranic symbols, lost in a maze of superstition and numerical manipulation.

As we've touched on before, those who reduced the Quran to a tool for symbols and talismans even dared to question God's absolute power, suggesting that His divinity was somehow tied to the secrets of names and numbers. This sparked a question among the Sufis: What exactly is the "secret of divinity"? Some claimed that the true "qualities of divinity" lay in the knowledge of the Asma al-Husna—the Beautiful Names of Allah—and the Sifat Ulya—the Supreme Attributes—especially the Ism-e-Azam, the Greatest Name, which they believed Allah kept solely for Himself.<sup>45</sup> The quest for this elusive Ism-e-Azam turned into a mystical scavenger hunt, with many attributed prayers believed to contain this

Greatest Name.<sup>46</sup> It was even said that the difference between Bismillah and the Ism-e-Azam was as stark as the difference between the white and black parts of an eye.<sup>47</sup> Because this obsession hinged on the arrangement of letters and the manipulation of numbers, the belief emerged that the letters of the Ism-e-Azam were hidden within certain prayers or Quranic verses, concealed in their closest resemblances. Yet, the true identity of the Ism-e-Azam remained wrapped in a veil of secrecy and ambiguity, an enigma that kept its followers in perpetual pursuit. Some said the Ism-e-Azam—the Greatest Name of Allah—was hidden in two verses of Surah Al-Baqarah. Others claimed it was in a verse of Surah Al-Imran, three in Surah Al-An'am, two in Surah Al-A'raf, two in Surah Al-Anfal, four in Surah Maryam and Surah Taha, and scattered across other verses throughout the Quran. Some believed that any verse containing the phrase "لا إله إلا هو"—"There is no god but He"—held the Ism-e-Azam.<sup>48</sup> Then there were those who suggested that the Ism-e-Azam was personal, varying for each individual, just as the prayers of the prophets were answered in different ways.<sup>49</sup> Some said it was embedded in the supplication of Yunus, while others insisted it could be found in Surah Al-Baqarah, Surah Al-Imran, and Surah Taha, as hinted in a narration from Abu Umamah in Ibn Majah. And then there were those who claimed the phrase "الحي القيوم"—"The Ever-Living, the Sustainer"—that appears in these three Surahs was where the hidden Ism-e-Azam truly resided. Ibn Qayyim and Imam Ghazali were said to have believed that "حي وقيوم"—"The Ever-Living, the Sustainer"—was the Ism-e-Azam, the Greatest Name of Allah. Rumor even had it that Imam Ghazali urged people to recite "يا حي يا قيوم" a thousand times a day. Scholars, too, weighed in with their theories. Al-Tabari noted in *Majma' al-Bayan* that "يا حي يا قيوم" and "ذو الجلال والإكرام"—"Lord of Majesty and Honor"—were also contenders for the Ism-e-Azam. A tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq hinted that "ربنا"—"Our Lord"—was the hidden name. These conflicting views never did pin down the elusive Ism-e-Azam, but they sure kept the

mystery alive. The idea that uncovering this secret name could catapult a seeker to spiritual heights, giving them not just mastery over the universe but actual control, was compelling.<sup>50</sup> While the enigma of the Ism-e-Azam remained cloaked in secrecy, the very belief in it, and the search for its basis in the Quran, unraveled the Quran's pure monotheistic paradigm. God's absolute power was now portrayed as being tied to these hidden secrets, supposedly within the grasp of those with mystical insight, turning the divine into a puzzle to be solved rather than a truth to be revered.

The misguided practices of these charlatans eventually took root, and over time, the veil of talismans and mystical symbols grew so thick that even critics of Sufism lost sight of the Quran's true purpose. Even someone as sharp as Ibn Qayyim fell for the idea of using Quranic verses as magical cures. In "Zad al-Ma'ad," he claimed that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used divine incantations to treat every illness and that anyone who recited "سلام على نوح في العالمين" ("Peace be upon Noah in all the worlds") in the evening would be safe from scorpion stings. This belief in the mystical powers of Quranic words was, at its core, an acceptance of the same secret power of "Kun" ("Be") that Sufis believed had spun the entire universe into existence—a power that supposedly imposed limitations on God's absolute authority through letters and numbers. Even Ibn Taymiyyah, often seen as the intellectual rebel and a symbol of sound reasoning, bought into these mystical claims. He started to see these fabricated properties as proof of the spiritual ranks of the pious.<sup>51</sup> In the manuals of talismans, there are detailed instructions on how to control spirits, subdue jinn, and use them to fulfill personal desires. Even Ibn Taymiyyah, known for his sharp intellect, began to see these supernatural feats as marks of piety. As for the mainstream scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah, they have often taken a reverent and imitative stance towards these misguided practices. Ashraf Ali Thanvi put it bluntly: "If sorcery involves blasphemous words, like seeking help from devils or stars, then it's outright disbelief. But if the words are permissible and it's

used to harm someone unlawfully or for wrongful purposes, then it's sinful and immoral. If it doesn't cause harm and isn't used for anything wrong, it's not called sorcery but simply a practice or talisman—and that's considered permissible."<sup>52</sup> In the Indian subcontinent, another supposed pillar of authentic Islam, Manazir Ahsan Gilani, was convinced that using Quranic verses to control jinn was a surefire method. Traditional scholars have labeled such verses "Qawari' al-Quran"—believed to have extraordinary powers, passed down through the experiences of the pious. For example, it's said that the verse {أفحسبتم أنما خلقناكم...}—"Did you think that We created you..."—if recited on a mountain, could make it tremble and move from its place.<sup>53</sup> This deep-seated belief in the mystical power of these so-called tried-and-true verses, combined with an almost obsessive reverence for their supposed properties, has led to a widespread obsession with the Quran's supposed magical qualities. As a result, the Quran has been reduced from its lofty status as a book of guidance to little more than a collection of incantations. When scholars and interpreters, who are supposed to uphold the integrity of the text, devote themselves to promoting these supposed mystical properties, filling page after page with discussions on the power of Quranic talismans, how can we expect the reader to approach the Quran as anything other than a book of charms and amulets?<sup>54</sup> Instead of seeking guidance, readers are being led to use the Quran for trivial, self-serving purposes, turning divine revelation into little more than a means to an end.

Gradually, the supposed mystical powers of Quranic verses birthed a new kind of kabbala within Islamic thought, something they started calling 'Aamaal Qurani'—Quranic practices. This twisted use of the Quran didn't just sideline its true purpose; it completely flipped the meaning of 'Aamaal' (practice). Suddenly, an 'Aamil' (practitioner) wasn't just someone performing good deeds; they were seen as a master of mysterious symbols, someone who could supposedly control jinn, devils, and spirits through these imagined Quranic talismans. This idea of 'Quranic practices' dug its roots deep into orthodox Islamic thought.

Scholars stamped their approval on the notion that there was no harm in using Quranic verses to battle devils or ward off evil spirits. Ibn Taymiyyah himself wrote that jinn flee from any house where Surah Al-Baqarah is recited. He even said that Ayat al-Kursi and the last verses of Surah Al-Baqarah were like Quranic sledgehammers—'Qawari' al-Quran'—meant to smash away devils and jinn.<sup>55</sup>

Once the belief in the mystical powers of Quranic verses took hold, it was like opening the floodgates for hadiths claiming similar miracles attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Suddenly, there were stories everywhere—like the one that promised if you recited Ayat al-Kursi before bed, Allah would assign a guardian to protect you, and your wealth would be safe from thieves.<sup>56</sup> Or the one that claimed reciting Surah Al-Inshirah while combing your hair would magically increase your sustenance.<sup>57</sup> The thing is, scholars of hadith had always been pretty relaxed about narrations concerning the virtues of certain actions. Some, with the purest of intentions, even promoted these tales to encourage Muslims toward good deeds. As a result, these baseless stories about the supposed miraculous powers of Quranic verses became embedded in our most trusted religious texts. And the Sufis? They took it a step further, compiling entire books filled with strange and fantastical remedies linked to Quranic verses. Take Dayrabi, for instance, who suggested that to cure phlegm, you should take seven small pebbles of salt, recite Ayat al-Kursi over each one seven times, and then consume them on an empty stomach for seven days.<sup>58</sup>

The Quran is often hailed as a source of healing and mercy for believers, but the Sufis, who never settled for just the surface meaning, began to twist the "Ayat-e-Shifa"—the verses of healing—to fit their own interpretations. Once the trend of using the Quran for personal gain caught on, it wasn't long before people started reading it as a book of spiritual medicine. They scoured its verses, searching for cures for every ailment, and soon enough, specific Surahs and verses were assigned to treat all sorts of physical illnesses. These so-called healing powers were

often claimed to have been tested by revered figures or revealed through divine inspiration. For instance, at least six verses were singled out as the go-to "Ayat-e-Shifa":

- {وَيَشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُّؤْمِنِينَ} (At-Tawbah: 14) — "And heal the breasts of a believing people."
- {وَشِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ} (Yunus: 57) — "And healing for what is in the breasts."
- {يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِّلنَّاسِ} (An-Nahl: 69) — "From its belly comes a drink of varying colors, in which there is healing for people."
- {وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ} (Al-Isra: 82) — "And We send down of the Quran that which is healing and mercy for the believers."
- {وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشفِينِي} (Ash-Shu'ara: 80) — "And when I am ill, it is He who cures me."
- {قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ} (Fussilat: 44) — "Say, it is for those who believe a guidance and a healing."

What started as an interpretation of spiritual healing morphed into something almost like a prescription pad for the soul, reducing divine revelation to little more than a celestial pharmacy.

It was said that reciting these Ayat-e-Shifa over a sick person or washing the words off and giving the water to drink could cure any illness, under any circumstances. The founders of spiritual or Quranic medicine completely ignored the fact that the Quran isn't a medical manual prescribing cures for every disease. Sure, the Quran offers healing on a deeper, spiritual level, but the effectiveness of a prescription lies in actually taking the medicine and following the treatment—not in the mere act of reciting the prescription or drinking its dissolved ink as if that alone could ward off disease. Take, for instance, the verse {يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِّلنَّاسِ} (An-Nahl: 69), which suggests that healing is found in various drinks of different colors that Allah has made accessible

to people through His power. But for those who insisted on seeing the Quran not just as a book of medicine but as a source of mystical healing, the remedy wasn't in using what the verse pointed to, but in the act of reciting it, chanting it endlessly, and drinking it dissolved in water. These people weren't about to trouble themselves with pondering the actual meaning behind these verses.

By turning the Quran into a manual for spiritual medicine, every verse was dragged away from its original purpose. Believers became obsessed with uncovering the supposed healing powers hidden within Quranic verses, focusing on remedies supposedly passed down from revered figures. The result? The Quran was chopped up and repurposed, with different verses assigned to cure various ailments. For instance, someone claimed that Ibn Abbas said reciting the verses of Surah Saba seven times a day would shield you from all calamities. Meanwhile, Ka'b al-Ahbar was credited with identifying seven other verses that supposedly offered protection from every sickness and hardship. The whole endeavor reduced the Quran to a collection of magical spells, far removed from its intended role as a source of guidance.<sup>59</sup>

As the quest for the hidden powers of Quranic verses took off, people started uncovering supposed new meanings in verses with particular sound patterns. For example, it was said that there are five verses in the Quran containing ten instances of the letter "Qaaf," and reciting these fifty "Qaafs" could unlock countless benefits. A hadith was even attributed to Aisha, claiming, "من كتب هذه الآيات الخمس فيها خمسون قافاً يوم الجمعة" يشربها أدخل في جوفه ألف شفاء ودواء وألف صحة وألف رحمة وألف رافة وألف يقين وألف قوة ومائة ألف نور ونزع عند كل داء وغل والخرف والغم"—"Whoever writes these five verses with fifty Qaafs on a Friday, washes them off, and drinks the water, will be filled with a thousand cures, a thousand remedies, a thousand health benefits, a thousand mercies, a thousand kindnesses, a thousand certainties, a thousand strengths, and a hundred thousand lights. All illnesses, grudges, sorrows, and grief will be washed away." They even



said that Salman al-Farsi used to recite these verses by the Prophet Muhammad's order.<sup>60</sup>

The believers in spiritual healing didn't just stop at assigning mystical powers to Quranic verses—they even changed the way the Quran was recited. Take Sheikh Abu al-Abbas al-Buni, for instance. He came up with a particular method for reciting Surah Yasin to fulfill personal needs, a method he claimed was passed down by the pious. According to his instructions, the reciter should repeat the phrase "Ya-Sin" sixty times before moving on. Then, after reaching the verse "*فهم لا ينصرون*" ("so they will not be helped"), the reciter is supposed to pause and recite a specific supplication. The whole process became a ritual, where reciting a few verses, followed by a special prayer and making one's wishes known, was seen as a spiritual formula for achieving desires.<sup>61</sup> Fariduddin Attar had a cure for eye pain that was as mystical as it was specific: recite the verse *{فكشفنا عنك...}* seven times while holding your thumbs' nails, then blow on them and rub them over your eyes. It wasn't just about pain relief—it was supposed to improve your vision too. Shah Waliullah even mentioned it in his "Qaul Jamil." Some went further, claiming that if you placed your hands over your eyes and recited *{فجعلناها سميعا بصيرا}* ("We made them hearing and seeing"), it would work wonders. Nizamuddin Auliya took things up a notch by pulling specific letters from the Quran—"Huroof-e-Surri," as he called them—and turning them into a remedy for eyesight. He had a ritual: recite *{ك، هـ، ع، س، ق، ح، م، ع، ن، ق}*—ten letters in total—while closing one finger with each letter. When all ten letters were recited and all ten fingers closed, you'd rub your closed fingers over your eyes for complete healing. The practice, seen all over the Indian subcontinent, of reciting "La ilaha illa Huwa Al-Hayyul Qayyum" ("There is no god but Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer"), blowing on your thumbs, and then rubbing them on your eyes? That's another ritual, born out of Nizamuddin Auliya's imaginative mix of faith and folk remedy.<sup>62</sup>

The charlatans of spiritual healing didn't just stop at inventing mystical properties and remedies; they went as far as altering the way the Quran was recited for medical purposes. Many Sufis, for example, insisted that to cure an illness, you had to recite Surah Al-Fatihah with "Bismillah" seamlessly connected to the "Al" of "Al-Hamd," putting special emphasis on that connection, as if the cure depended on this exacting pronunciation.<sup>63</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi took it a step further, declaring that if you wanted to use Surah Al-Fatihah to fulfill a need, you had to stay in the same place after Maghrib prayer, and recite it forty times, then pray, invoking the sanctity of Surah Al-Fatihah to make your request heard.<sup>64</sup> In "Fath al-Majid," it was noted that some pious figures believed that if you experienced pain in any part of your body, you should place your hand on the spot, recite Surah Al-Fatihah seven times, and then pray. They believed that this would make the pain disappear, as if the words themselves carried a hidden power to heal.<sup>65</sup>

In treating the Quran as a book of talismans, the Sufis did not respect its sanctity. For example, using Surah Al-Fatihah for healing by reciting it and blowing over an illness, or carrying its numerical charm for influencing hearts, might satisfy the desires of ordinary people. However, for those who wanted to advance further on the spiritual path or who sought to exert influence over the world through Quranic verses, Surah Al-Fatihah, as revealed, seemed insufficient. So, they not only altered the way Surah Al-Fatihah was recited and invented prayers to harness its spirituality, but they also added rhyming and harmonious sentences between the verses, which essentially became a parody of the divine speech. For example, in the extended version of Surah Al-Fatihah created by Al-Buni, after "الحمد لله رب العالمين" (Alhamdulillahi Rabbil 'Alameen - "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds"), they added contrived verses like: "منور بصائر العارفين بأنوار المعرفة واليقين وجاذب سائر المحققين بجذبات القرب والتمكين" وفاتح أقفال قلوب الموحدين بمفاتيح التوحيد وجاذبها بجذبات القرب والفتح المبين الذي أحسن كل خلقه "وبدأ خلق الإنسان من طين ثم جعل نسله من سلالة من ماء مهين" (Illuminator of the

insights of the gnostics with the lights of knowledge and certainty, and attractor of the true seekers with the attractions of closeness and empowerment, and opener of the locks of the hearts of the monotheists with the keys of oneness, and attractor of them with the attractions of closeness and manifest victory, who perfected every creation and began the creation of man from clay, then made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid").<sup>66</sup>

In the same vein, Ibn Arabi took liberties with Surah Al-Fatihah, adding his own rhyming phrases after "الحمد لله رب العالمين" ("Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds"). He penned lines like "حمداً يفوق حمداً الحامدين،" "حمداً يكون رضاءً ومرضيّاً عند رب العالمين" ("Praise that surpasses the praise of the praisers, praise that is pleasing and accepted by the Lord of all worlds"), turning the original Surah into something entirely different. Ibn Arabi boldly claimed that anyone who recites this distorted version of Surah Al-Fatihah seven times a day would gain access to visions of the unseen, stay attuned to the realms of angels and spirits, and see all their worldly and spiritual desires fulfilled.<sup>67</sup> For those aiming to conquer the hearts of humans and command the obedience of angels, a specific regimen was laid out: seven days, each dedicated to one of the seven verses of this Surah, recited in carefully measured segments. They called it a "great secret," as if unlocking some hidden code to divine power.<sup>68</sup> In Sufi lore, stories abound of crossing rivers, walking on water, or performing miracles, all thanks to the blessings of Surah Al-Fatihah—feats that the average reciter couldn't hope to accomplish. The explanation? These mystics had tapped into the hidden properties of Quranic verses, making the impossible seem almost routine. Take the tale from "Dalil al-Arifin," where Khwaja Usman Harooni supposedly crossed a river by reciting Surah Al-Fatihah five times before stepping onto the water and walking across.<sup>69</sup> Anyone who questioned these miraculous stories was quickly hushed, told that it was all due to a secret knowledge of the Surah's mystical depths.

In their quest for Quranic powers, even the most orthodox and reputable scholars wandered into territories where neither the Quran nor the earliest Muslims had ever ventured. They concocted prayers meant to harness supernatural forces, introduced meaningless, absurd phrases and symbols, and somehow believed that by using these, they could control extraordinary spiritual powers or shield themselves from looming dangers. These were the very same pre-Islamic superstitions that the Quran had come to obliterate. Yet, through the use of talismans and amulets, the shadow of those ancient beliefs crept back into Islamic thought, wrapping itself in the guise of spirituality. Because all of this was done in the name of the Quran, even the most learned and devout scholars found themselves paralyzed, unable to muster the courage to completely reject it or to subject it to rational and religious scrutiny. This is why, despite the constant assaults on Quranic principles by the Sufis, some scholars maintained a cautious distance, hesitant to take any significant action against them. The situation only worsened in the centuries that followed, especially after Al-Ghazali became the champion of the Sufi worldview, making it nearly impossible for anyone to take a stand against these ideas. The fear of challenging such deeply entrenched beliefs turned into an intellectual paralysis that we'll explore further later.

The sheer audacity and heartlessness of turning the Quran into a manual for dark rituals is glaring in the base practices these so-called mystics and charlatans endorsed. Take, for instance, the bizarre spell to make someone fall hopelessly in love: it involved taking the right arm of a goat, writing Surah Yasin along with the names of the person seeking love and their desired target on the untouched piece of meat. This ritual was to be carried out after Friday prayers, in a solitary place, completely naked. The meat was then placed in a pot and buried under a stove. The absurd claim was that this would cause the desired person's heart to be consumed with restless love for the one casting the spell.<sup>70</sup> In the lore of the Gangohi family, there's a so-called talisman known as "Asma Kahf," a jumble of nonsensical letters strung together as "إلهي بحرمة يملخا، مكسلمينا، "

كشفوظط، كشافطيونس، تبونس، أذر فطيرني، يوانس بولس، وكلهم قطمير وعلى الله قصد السبيل ومنها جائر ولو شاء لهداكم أجمعين، فقط<sup>71</sup> It's a collection of empty sounds passed off as something mystical, with no meaning but plenty of reverence in occult circles. This isn't the only one; in the Indian subcontinent, another famed and supposedly powerful talisman reads "بسم الله عليقة مليقة ثليقة تليقة بحق لا إله" "إلا الله محمد رسول الله وعلي ولي الله عليقا،" a string of words that feels more like a tongue-twister than a spiritual invocation. Some even believe in writing "عليقا، مليقا، تليقا، ما في قلوبهم سليقا أنت تعلمون" on green leaves, as if this act could unlock some hidden power.<sup>72</sup> It's the absurdity of dressing up gibberish as divine, making a mockery of the sacred by wrapping it in the mystique of the unknown. Some prayers were concocted with nothing but gibberish—strings of meaningless words and names like "طاطائيل، ميطائيل، مهلائيل يا" "تمثائيل"—invented to sound like the names of angels: Jibril, Israfil, Mikail. It was all a parody, a mockery of the sacred. These nonsensical names were woven into elaborate rituals of pleading and invocation, and even imaginary letters were thrown in for good measure. They claimed some of these letters were from the Torah, others from the Gospel, as if mixing and matching from different scriptures could somehow lend credibility to the absurdity they were peddling.<sup>73</sup>

The obsessive quest to uncover the so-called "secrets" of the Quran eventually opened the door for all sorts of twisted minds to cloak their delusions in the sanctity of the sacred text. Suddenly, references to other scriptures were smuggled in under the guise of Quranic wisdom, giving legitimacy to practices that had nothing to do with faith—or even basic reason. Ridiculous phrases, supposedly divine in origin, were passed off as Islamic rituals. Take, for instance, the claim that if you recite "بدوح" seven times over water and have someone drink it, they'll fall hopelessly in love with you.<sup>74</sup> No one stopped to ask the obvious question: how is this different from the incantations of black magic? Yet, these absurd practices were seamlessly woven into the fabric of the faith, leaving common sense far behind.

When the true purpose of the Quran gets buried under the weight of human desires, when its verses are twisted into formulas for petty, worldly gains, and when respected scholars start endorsing the use of Quranic verses for everything from controlling hearts to finding hidden treasures, ensuring the birth of male children, or boosting sexual potency, the absurd becomes sanctified.<sup>75</sup>

Imagine believing that reciting "فذبجوها بما كادوا يفعلون" while cutting a melon will make it sweeter,<sup>76</sup> or that "المغني" whispered during sex will make a wife more responsive.<sup>77</sup> Some believe that "وكلهم باسط ذراعيه بالوصيد" can protect you from a lion or dog attack,<sup>78</sup> or that tying an amulet inscribed with "وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي" around a woman's thigh will ease her labor pains.<sup>79</sup> And in the height of absurdity, reciting "اهدنا الصراط المستقيم" is said to give you a perfectly straight part in your hair.<sup>80</sup> When such superstitions become intertwined with faith, it's no wonder that no one stops to question the foreign origins of these so-called spiritual practices.

The audacity of these so-called mystics, who twisted the Quran to serve their own ends, threw such a heavy curtain over its true purpose that even those who tried to engage with the Quran directly, amid an atmosphere thick with talismans and charms, remained largely oblivious to its deeper spiritual guidance. A vast number of believers, whose hearts recoiled at the thought of using Quranic verses for magical practices, clung to the Quran with a reverence that, ironically, missed the point. Instead of seeing it as a guide for life, they began to treat it as a tool for earning rewards and blessings. The devout and the learned, who still saw the Quran as a central, sacred document, came to believe that frequent recitation and completing readings were the key to accumulating divine favor and securing salvation. It was as if the Quran had been reduced to a spiritual slot machine, where every verse—some more lucrative than others—paid out rewards to the reciter. This obsession with racking up spiritual points overshadowed the Quran's true role as a guide for living a meaningful life. Some well-meaning souls, in an attempt to draw people

back to the Quran during a time when Muslim society was drifting into the clutches of non-Quranic ideas, latched onto certain hadiths. Their goal was noble: to encourage a return to Quranic teachings. But these hadiths, especially those emphasizing the virtues of recitation, ended up pushing people further away from the Quran's true purpose. Take the obscure hadith from Tirmidhi, for example, which had a profound effect on the literalist approach to Quranic recitation. It claimed that whoever recites a single letter from the Book of Allah earns a reward, and that reward is multiplied tenfold. The hadith even goes so far as to say that "ا ل م" (Alif Lam Meem) isn't just one letter but three separate ones: "ا", "ل", and "م".<sup>81</sup> Similarly, another narration from Bayhaqi suggests that "بِسْمِ اللَّهِ" should be broken down into individual letters: "ا", "ب", "س", and "م".

These kinds of hadiths didn't spark a genuine return to the Quran's teachings. Instead, they shifted the focus entirely to the quantity of recitation, turning the Quran into something transactional. To the reader, it became less a sacred guide for life and more a book where every letter, every verse, was a chance to rack up rewards like points in some spiritual game. This mindset birthed a kind of commercialism around the Quran. People started hunting for specific surahs that were said to offer more bang for their buck—surahs that could supposedly yield maximum rewards with minimal effort. It was claimed that Surah Al-Ikhlās is equivalent to one-third of the Quran, so reciting "قل هو الله أحد" three times was as good as reading the whole thing.<sup>82</sup> Another claim was that Surah Al-Fatihah was worth two-thirds of the Quran in merit.<sup>83</sup> And then there's the hadith attributed to Hasan al-Basri, suggesting that reciting Surah Al-Fatihah was like reading the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and Quran all at once.<sup>84</sup>

Turning the Quran into a reward-generating machine led to a flood of fabricated hadiths, filling pages upon pages with empty promises. It was said that reciting Surah Yaseen would earn you the reward of reading the Quran ten times over.<sup>85</sup> Another claim insisted that simply reading

Surah Yaseen with the intention of pleasing Allah would wipe away all your past sins, and if you made it a nightly ritual and then died, you'd be guaranteed the death of a martyr. The virtues of Surah Yaseen were hyped up to such an extent that its blessings were believed to extend beyond the living to the dead as well. Recite it, they said, and you'll be forgiven; it'll fill an empty stomach, help you find a lost animal, guide a lost traveler, ease the agony of death, and even make childbirth less painful. Even though scholars have voiced their doubts about these kinds of hadiths, the notion that the Quran is a tool for racking up spiritual rewards and solving life's problems—a notion deeply ingrained by the mystics—has stubbornly persisted. Today, in countless Muslim homes, reciting Surah Yaseen to aid the dead or to ease the agony of someone on their deathbed is just a part of the routine, a ritual that's become almost automatic.

Some verses were said to wield such power that they'd actually argue on behalf of their reciters in the grave, pleading with God: "If I'm part of Your Book, accept my intercession; if not, erase me from Your pages."<sup>86</sup> These two commanding surahs, "Tabarakalladhi" and "Ha Mim As-Sajda," were claimed to bestow upon their reciters the same merit as standing in prayer on the Night of Power.<sup>87</sup> It didn't stop there—recite Surah Al-Hadid, Al-Waqi'ah, and Ar-Rahman, and you'd supposedly be counted among the elite in Jannat al-Firdaus. This was the reward for those who engaged with the Quran, even if just to earn points in the afterlife. But in their zeal to glorify the Quran's benefits, these well-meaning souls sidestepped the core Quranic principle that each person is responsible for their own deeds. The idea emerged that those who memorize the Quran and live by it could even intercede for ten family members already bound for Hell.<sup>88</sup> It's as if the Quran was turned into a spiritual insurance policy, offering get-out-of-Hell-free cards for loved ones.

By stripping the Quran of its true role as a guide and reducing it to a tool for racking up spiritual points, the door to its real meaning was



slammed shut, even as people outwardly clung to it. The focus shifted entirely to how much you could recite, how many rewards you could stockpile. This obsession with quantity over quality birthed mystics like Baba Nolakha Hazari, whose sanctity was measured by the staggering claim that he completed the Quran 900,000 times in his life.<sup>89</sup> The idea of the Quran as a means to gain divine favor, rather than a source of enlightenment, became deeply entrenched in traditional Islamic thought. It wasn't just about collecting rewards for oneself anymore; even the dead were being showered with the merits of these relentless recitations. The idea of communicating with the dead? That was a brainchild of the Sufis, pure and simple. Once people believed they could send rewards to the deceased, it wasn't long before this notion paved the way for Fatiha readings. Suddenly, lavish feasts of rich, savory dishes were being sent as gifts to the souls of the departed, all under the guise of Fatiha. One particularly pious elder even went so far as to request in his will that chicken, biryani, and kebabs be part of his Fatiha.<sup>90</sup> And yet, no one stopped to ask the obvious: if you can send rewards to the dead, why not punishment? Could someone just as easily send their sins as a gift to the soul of an enemy, just like they send rewards?

For those obsessed with amassing spiritual points, the recitation of the Quran alone just didn't cut it. Their thirst was unquenchable. Sufi orders responded by crafting entire tomes of supposed prophetic prayers and rituals, each claiming virtues that outshone the Quran itself. The hunger for rewards spawned prayers so steeped in mysticism they were believed to unlock the secrets of specific Quranic chapters. Some of these prayers were said to be divine revelations to particular mystics. Take the Du'a Ganj-ul-Arsh, for instance—a prayer that, according to legend, appeared written on the very Throne of God, with some tales even attributing it to the angel Gabriel. This prayer was marketed as a cure-all, a mystical quick fix for every human desire, be it legitimate or otherwise. The Du'a Qadah-e-Moazzam carried similar promises—recite it, and you'd not only rake in endless spiritual rewards but also secure your spot

as a saint.<sup>91</sup> Whether it was Du'a Suryani, Durood Taj, Durood Tanajina, Durood Mahi, Durood Muqaddas, Durood Lakhhi, or Durood Akbar, along with the Wazifa Haft Haikal—these invocations were ascribed with so many exaggerated virtues and guaranteed solutions to all worldly and spiritual needs that even the supposed benefits of reciting the Quran seemed overshadowed. Reciting the Quran for rewards and salvation began to feel like a tedious, never-ending chore. In the rush to gather both worldly and spiritual treasures, people turned to these collections of prayers and rituals, entirely fabricated by human minds, with no real connection to the Quran, yet they were embraced as if they held the keys to both this world and the next. Religious zealots clung to the illusion that reciting a handful of Quranic verses tacked onto their treasured compilations—Hizb al-Bahr, Hizb al-Azam, Jamia al-Salat, Haft Haikal, Mafatih al-Jinan, and Hisn Haseen—could somehow serve as a magic formula to rebuild their worldly and spiritual lives. In the mystical lore of Sufi texts, there was no shortage of bizarre tales, like the one about the shroud-stealer who, despite forty years of grave-robbing, was granted entry into paradise simply because he devoted the time between dawn and mid-morning to these rituals and chants.<sup>92</sup> Reciting the Quran never carried the kind of allure that the supposed powers of the *Durood-e-Mahi* did. They claimed that one single recitation by a fish endowed it with such divine power that fire itself was commanded never to harm it.<sup>93</sup> When the mystical invocations dreamed up by these so-called mystics are seen as so potent, why would anyone bother with the Quran for spiritual growth?

## Twisting Quranic Terms into Mystical Riddles

The profound distortion of divine revelation, the way its core purpose was twisted, and the audacious grafting of a foreign mystical framework onto the very heart of Islam—this was the victory the Sufis managed to pull off. Their triumph wasn't just in introducing these alien ideas but in cloaking them with a veneer of piety, making them palatable, even appealing, to the broader Muslim community. Over time, these mystical reinterpretations of fundamental Quranic terms became so ingrained in the collective consciousness that they were mistaken for the original intent of the Quran itself. The slow erosion of the Quran's true meaning was so insidious that what started as a deviation morphed into an accepted norm. To keep it brief, let's focus on a few key Quranic terms whose mystical redefinition has subtly, yet radically, reshaped the faith into something nearly unrecognizable, all under the guise of spirituality.

### Ulul Amr

As traditional jurists and scholars took control of the interpretation of 'Ulul Amr,' they redefined it to mean obedience to religious leaders, thereby securing a privileged position for themselves. They distorted the Quranic verse فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ ("Ask those who possess knowledge") to justify the emergence of a new religious elite, resembling a priestly class within Islam. In a context where oppressive kings had usurped the role of 'Ulul Amr,' where unjust leaders had seized power, and where doubts about the legitimacy of these rulers lingered among ordinary Muslims, these scholars exploited the situation. They positioned themselves as spiritual authorities, reinforcing their status with fabricated sayings like

العلماء ورثة الانبياء ("The scholars are the heirs of the prophets"). And in this environment, the Sufis—ever adept at navigating religious and social currents—leveraged the chaos to advance their own mystical agendas. Especially in a world where they insisted that the true spirit of faith was their exclusive domain, the Sufis took things even further than the traditional scholars. Not only did they claim the title of 'Ulul Amr' for themselves, but they also created an entire system of spiritual allegiance around the concept of batini khilafat, turning the quest for spiritual enlightenment into a matter of pledging loyalty to their authority. In their hands, the path to salvation became something only they could grant, and they solidified this power by fabricating sayings like "الشيخ في " ("The sheikh among his people is like the prophet among his community").<sup>94</sup> Elevating the sheikh to a prophetic status sent a clear message: for true believers, the sheikh was now the ultimate source of guidance, almost like a living prophet for their time. Imam Ghazali even declared, "المريد يحتاج إلى شيخ... فمن لم يكن له شيخ يهديه قاده الشيطان إلى طريقه لا محالة" ("The disciple needs a sheikh... whoever does not have a sheikh to guide them will inevitably be led by the devil to his path").<sup>95</sup>

As Sufi orders began to take root, the belief that one's spiritual salvation hinged on unwavering devotion to a living sheikh became almost gospel. By the 7th century Hijri, Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi penned Awarif al-Ma'arif, effectively laying down a new religious manifesto, dictating the protocols for living a Sufi life. The sheikh, in the act of bestowing the khirqah or accepting a disciple's bay'ah, was seen as the Prophet's stand-in, his hand a proxy for the Prophet's own.<sup>96</sup> The doctrine went further, warning that even a fleeting doubt about the sheikh could unravel one's spiritual journey entirely.<sup>97</sup> Total surrender to the sheikh was equated with surrendering to Allah and His Messenger, making the sheikh's command as sacrosanct as if it were uttered by the Prophet himself.<sup>98</sup> Sheikh Suhrawardi, in his quest to cement the almost tyrannical authority of the Sufi sheikh, turned to the Quranic verse فلا و {

ربك لا يؤمنون حتى يحكموك فيما شجر بينهم—"But no, by your Lord, they will not truly believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute." He used this as a tool to insist that true faith required unquestioning submission to the sheikh's decisions. Suhrawardi urged believers that if they ever found themselves doubting their sheikh, they should remember the story of Musa and Khidr. In his view, spiritual enlightenment was only for those who surrendered so completely they became *fana fi'l-sheikh*—annihilated in the sheikh.<sup>99</sup> Suhrawardi's teachings are so revered that his book became a cornerstone for Sufi seekers, playing a pivotal role in the creation and organization of the *khanqahs*, those spiritual sanctuaries where disciples gathered under the sheikh's command.

Although the notion of *Batini Khilāfah* (spiritual caliphate) was a concept utterly alien to the original faith—unsupported by reason, Sharia, or the early Muslim community—it was nevertheless woven into the fabric of Sufi practice. This innovation, where the sheikh assumed responsibility for the afterlife of their followers and where pledging allegiance to the sheikh became a supposed prerequisite for salvation, was a form of monasticism that even the rabbis and Pharisees had never dared to imagine. Yet, to justify this outlandish and un-Islamic hierarchy, it was cleverly argued that the *bay'ah* of Islam, which had ended with the Prophet's passing, was now being resurrected by the Sufis, who claimed to breathe new life into it. Some Sufis, in their quest to legitimize the practice of *bay'ah*, didn't hesitate to rewrite history, crafting a narrative that painted early Islam with a brush of coercion and force. They claimed, without a shred of irony, that during the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Islam was spread not through reasoned persuasion but by the blade, and therefore, the practice of *bay'ah* was conveniently set aside. Shah Waliullah, with an audacity that borders on revisionism, argued that "the *bay'ah* of Islam was neglected during the time of the Caliphs, especially the Rightly Guided ones, because the spread of Islam in their days was mainly through conquest and the sword, not through reasoned

argument or by people's willingness and desire."<sup>100</sup> This rewriting of history wasn't just a footnote in the margins but a wholesale remaking of the narrative, all to justify a system that had little to do with the original spirit of Islam.

Granting such an irrational role any form of legitimacy within the faith had profound consequences. It shifted the focus of Muslims away from addressing political deviations and erased the yearning for a return to the Caliphate modeled after the Prophetic way. The aspiration for this ideal began to fade, as Sufi masters—these *khulafā' bāṭin* or hidden caliphs—started offering spiritual guarantees of salvation in the afterlife, requiring only the right intentions and moral corrections, effectively bypassing the lengthy and difficult journey toward real political reform.<sup>101</sup> Some Sufi leaders became so audacious as to openly promise their followers direct entry into paradise. In these mystical circles, it became routine to comfort followers with promises like, "Don't worry, I won't enter paradise until I've brought all of you with me." As Abdul Qadir Jilani famously declared, "I will not stand before the Divine Presence until all my followers have entered paradise."<sup>102</sup> It's said that Hatam al-Asamm once told his disciples, "If you can't drag souls bound for hell into paradise on the Day of Judgment, then don't even think about calling yourselves my students." Similar grandiose claims are also tied to Bayazid al-Bistami, who didn't shy away from such lofty promises.<sup>103</sup>

The moment esoteric caliphate gained legitimacy in religious discourse, it marked the beginning of a catastrophic shift. The once-central figure of the Imam al-Muslimin, the unifying force of the Muslim world, was suddenly pushed to the margins. What followed was a disintegration of any hope for unity, as the community fractured into splintered identities. The Sufi mystics, driven by their personal revelations and visions, began staking their claims to their own brands of esoteric caliphate. And just like that, an avalanche of Sufi orders flooded the spiritual landscape. In the beginning, these orders desperately clung to a connection with historical figures, trying to root themselves in the

past for a semblance of authenticity. By the fifth century, Ali had been anointed as the "Shah-e-Wilayat," the king of sainthood, and everyone was eager to trace their spiritual lineage back to him. But the appeal of the esoteric caliphate was too tempting, too intoxicating. Soon, many mystics decided to skip the lengthy historical ties altogether, boldly declaring that they had received the mantle of caliphate directly from Khidr himself.

The sway these so-called esoteric caliphs held over the Muslim psyche was nothing short of staggering. People began to crowd their Sufi lodges like moths to a flame, driven by the desperate hope that a single, fleeting glance of favor from the Sheikh could somehow secure their salvation in both this life and the next. Fazlur Rahman Ganj Muradabadi, a Sheikh himself, summed up the sentiment when he said, "In the past, there were saints so revered that even if a person merely caught sight of them from afar, Allah would show them mercy and forgive their sins."<sup>104</sup> This belief in the Sheikh's power over salvation became so pervasive that a vast majority of the faithful surrendered their unconditional obedience to these esoteric leaders. The grip of these so-called caliphs tightened to the point where they dictated every aspect of their followers' lives, bending them to their will—even to the extent of pushing them to renounce the very core beliefs of Islam. There's a tale about Shibli that captures the audacity of some spiritual leaders: he allegedly demanded that a would-be disciple recite the declaration of faith with his own name inserted into it before agreeing to take them on.<sup>105</sup> And then there's the story of Moinuddin Chishti, who, in a bold test of one follower's loyalty, insisted they proclaim, "There is no god but Allah, and Chishti is the messenger of Allah."<sup>106</sup>

The esoteric caliphs seized their moment, exploiting the chaos and fragmentation of the Muslim world to toy with the very essence of the faith. The so-called Amir al-Muslimin, those who were supposed to be the guardians of the community, were either too oblivious or too powerless to combat this creeping deviation. They couldn't muster the

resolve to stand against a belief system that was slowly gaining traction among the masses. Meanwhile, the tyrannical rulers, whose legitimacy was always under a cloud of doubt, found it more convenient to make peace with these spiritual usurpers. For these rulers, paying homage at the Sufi lodges was a way to curry favor with the public, and in turn, the Sufi Sheikhs basked in the glow of enhanced public reverence. It was a twisted alliance, a mutual back-scratching arrangement that allowed both the political and spiritual impostors to tighten their grip on the community. Together, they cast an ever-darkening shadow over the Muslim world, prolonging their reign of manipulation and control.

## Ruh

The rise of these esoteric caliphs to their extraordinary social standing was all about their connection to spirituality—viewed as the antithesis of materialism. Honestly, the shift among Muslims from a life of devout piety to one of spiritual escapism happened because these mystical leaders redefined Islam in a way that drained the allure of a straightforward, pious existence. Religion was reimagined as a journey, where detaching from worldly ties and engaging in spiritual struggles would lead to profound, almost otherworldly experiences. The Sufis rooted this exotic notion of spiritual life in Quranic verses that mention "Ruh"—the soul, the spirit—something described as beyond human grasp, cloaked in mystery.

The notion that the human body is a blend of spirit and matter—this wasn't an original idea but one borrowed straight from ancient Greek philosophy. The belief that the soul is immortal, simply shedding one form for another, is a relic from ancient cultures, especially the Vedantic traditions, where reincarnation and transmigration were the norm. In these belief systems, people tried to demystify the soul by oversimplifying it, imagining it as some ethereal substance that, once it leaves the body, just fades away. But this whole concept of the soul, the human spirit, was completely alien to the Quranic worldview. The Quran's use of the term



"Ruh" didn't even come close to carrying those kinds of meanings. It was an entirely different paradigm, one that refused to fit neatly into the boxes built by ancient philosophies.

In the Quran, whenever the word "Ruh" pops up, it's not talking about some mystical life force or an ethereal soul—it's all about divine revelation, the very essence of God's message being delivered to His chosen ones. Take, for instance, verses like {يُنَزِّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ} (An-Nahl: 2) or {وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِمَّنْ أَمَرْنَا} (Ash-Shura: 52). It's clear—Ruh is the revelation itself, not some abstract spirit floating around. When the Quran mentions {نَزَّلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ} (Ash-Shu'ara: 193-194) or {قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ} (An-Nahl: 102), it's referring to the divine messenger, the agency that carries God's words down to earth.<sup>107</sup> But here's where the confusion creeps in. Many Sufis, with their penchant for the mystical, misinterpret phrases like {وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ} (As-Sajda: 9). They've twisted this to mean that God breathed a piece of His own spirit into Adam, opening the door for Vedantic and Greek notions of the soul to slip into the conversation. If we strip away the ancient notions of the soul and approach this verse with fresh eyes, in the context of the Quran's broader message, it's not hard to see that the "breathing of the spirit" is really about God giving humans the unique ability to grasp knowledge through divine revelation. This is what sets humans apart from other creatures—while animals are left without the capacity to engage with revelation, humans are endowed with the extraordinary ability to absorb both the knowledge of the world and the wisdom of the divine. In the Quranic worldview, spiritual life isn't about mystical experiences or abstract contemplation; it's about shaping human existence in obedience to and under the guidance of divine revelation. In stark contrast, the Sufis crafted their own blueprints for spiritual life, pushing the light of divine revelation into the background. Their focus shifted entirely to a self-made version of spirituality, one designed to offer psychological comfort rather than true enlightenment. They concocted rituals, visions, and

disciplines that had no roots in revelation and were completely foreign to the early Muslims. The result? Those who wandered off the Quranic path, chasing the esoteric teachings of these mystics, ended up chasing illusions—phantoms of divine revelation that offered nothing but empty satisfaction. Each step on their spiritual journey led them deeper into a maze of their own making, where their aspirations were buried in the tombs of their own psychological constructs.

The Quran clearly discourages any unnecessary obsession with the "Ruh," the essence of divine revelation. But the Sufis, ever consumed by the urge to unravel the secrets of the cosmos and the mysteries of the divine, couldn't resist diving deep into this forbidden curiosity. With the Quran offering little detail, their quest for knowledge inevitably led them to the intellectual and cultural wells of other religions. Under the spell of foreign ideas, they first fell into the trap of believing in the duality of soul and body, and soon enough, their imagination ran wild, trapping them in bizarre, irrational beliefs about the soul. As they tried to interpret "Ruh" through a non-Quranic lens, its original meaning—divine revelation—faded into the background. The Sufis started to see the soul as some kind of mysterious entity, something that slips away at the moment of death. The concept of the angel of death snatching the soul became a popular narrative, and soon, the musings of the mystics were overflowing with tales and legends, like the one about how Moses challenged the angel of death who came to claim his soul. The Sufis, always drawn to the mystique of their own spiritual experiences, saw their encounters with the divine as echoing Moses' experience on Mount Sinai. This led to a slew of tales about besting the angel of death, sending him back empty-handed.<sup>108</sup> But venturing into these speculative realms opened the floodgates for all sorts of irrational ideas about the soul to seep into Muslim thought. Take Ibn Arabi, for instance—he spun the idea that the soul is something that can literally breathe life into a body part with just a touch. He even went so far as to claim that the soul's true origin was none other than the angel Gabriel, who was, in fact, the soul itself. Samiri,

according to Ibn Arabi, stumbled upon this cosmic secret. By scooping up dust from Gabriel's footprints and mixing it into the golden calf idol, he infused it with a soul, causing it to speak like a living cow. This is the meaning he drew from the verse {فقبض قبضة من اثر الرسول}. In Ibn Arabi's view, the phrase {كلمته ألقاها إلى مريم وروح منه} hints at an intimate encounter between Gabriel and Mary, one that resulted in the creation of Jesus' body from their combined essence. And because Jesus was considered the "Spirit of God," it supposedly made sense that he could perform miracles like raising the dead.<sup>109</sup> These wild theories, concocted by the Sufis, were little more than their own fanciful guesses. Yet, they managed to convince ordinary Muslims that they held the keys to countless other cosmic secrets—secrets they claimed to know but refused to share, cloaking their speculations in a veneer of mystical wisdom. In his seminal work *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Ghazali suggested that certain mysteries are better left unspoken. But despite this caution, the Sufis couldn't resist diving into the subject of the soul whenever the opportunity arose. As Ghazali put it, "The body is not part of your true nature and essence; therefore, the destruction of the body does not mean the destruction of you."<sup>110</sup> So, what exactly is the soul? Where does it go after death, and how does it achieve salvation? These questions naturally bubbled up in the minds of those who subscribed to the duality of body and soul. Yet, instead of offering a clear-cut answer, the Sufis staked their claim on spiritual salvation, asserting that "كَمَا أَنَّ لِلْجَسَادِ طَبِيًّا كَذَلِكَ لِلرُّوحِ وَالْأَنْبِيَاءِ عَلَيْهِمُ الصَّلَاةُ" —"Just as there is medicine for the body, there is also medicine for the soul, and the prophets, peace be upon them, are the physicians of the soul."<sup>111</sup> The Sufis, seeing themselves as the torchbearers of prophetic spirituality, positioned themselves as the gatekeepers of all things spiritual. They made the community believe that for any matter of the soul, they needed the Sufis' blessings and guidance.

This non-Quranic take on the soul left a deep imprint on the Muslim psyche, to the point where beliefs that echoed Hindu traditions—like the

soul wandering, returning, and even being contacted—became commonplace. The Sufis took it a step further, embedding the notion that the souls of saints could still intercede on behalf of the living, and even that the Prophet Muhammad might physically appear in the gatherings of the faithful. Some of the more prominent Sufis went so far as to suggest that the souls of revered figures actually gained extraordinary powers some four or five hundred years after their death.<sup>112</sup> This Vedantic-inspired belief in the soul's survival and potency drove the Sufis to turn their focus toward the departed souls of their spiritual masters. They felt compelled to recite prayers for them, visit their graves, and seek out a connection to these spirits, hoping to draw from their energy and passion. The whole idea of shirk and grave worship is deeply embedded in this Vedantic notion that souls never really die. Instead, as Shah Waliullah put it, they acquire special powers after a certain period. He suggested that when people focus on the graves of these spiritual masters, there's a kind of spiritual energy that flows from the souls of the deceased to the living seekers.<sup>113</sup> The Sufi writings are filled with tales where the souls of dead saints, and even the Prophet Muhammad himself, are said to have appeared in their gatherings, in the flesh.<sup>114</sup> This entire spiritual enterprise, dressed up in Quranic terminology, was nothing more than a deliberate distortion of sacred meanings—a blatant attempt to twist the words ("يَحْرِفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ") to fit their own narrative. And it was all done by those who loved to see themselves as the keepers of righteousness, even as they strayed far from its essence.

## 6

# Revelation and the Idea of Divine Insight

The entire framework of spiritual life rested on the belief that the so-called righteous had a much deeper grasp of revelation and its essence than the average person could ever hope to achieve. There's this general notion that the Sufis sought to stretch the boundaries of revelation by introducing terms like "kashf" (unveiling), "ilqa" (inspiration), and "ilham" (intuition). If that were all, it would still be a bold move. But the reality is far more audacious. The Sufis didn't just stop at bending revelation to fit their own mystical leanings; they went further, much further, by fundamentally reshaping the very concept of revelation itself through their personal experiences of "kashf," "ilqa," and "ilham." They didn't just expand the idea—they rewrote it entirely, blurring the lines between divine truth and personal insight.

The blame for distorting the concept of revelation doesn't rest solely on the Sufis. The Hadith scholars share in this responsibility, as their fervor led them to divide the clear-cut idea of revelation into "recited" (wahy matlu) and "non-recited" (wahy ghayr matlu) forms. This division opened the floodgates for creating secondary and supplementary texts of revelation within Islam, mirroring what happened with the Jews. When people started to believe that Gabriel delivered not only the Quran but also the Sunnah or Hadith to the Prophet Muhammad, it was almost inevitable that they would begin seeking revelation outside of the Quran. The Sufis, who claimed a direct line to the Divine, found plenty of validation in Hadith Qudsi. The cryptic, intimate tone of these sayings peeled back layers of secrets that the Quran left untouched. For the Sufis, who often placed more importance on their direct connection with God

than on the Prophet Muhammad's intermediary role, and who were so certain of their encounters with the truth that they would boldly declare, "My Lord inspired me, or my Lord revealed to my heart," Hadith Qudsi wasn't just a source of authority—it was a gateway to fresh, immediate revelations and inspirations. To really get why the Sufis veered off course when it came to revelation, you have to look back at the debates that gripped the early Muslim community. These debates, which swirled around the nature of revelation, eventually gave birth to the distinction between oral and written revelation by the end of the second century. Without understanding this historical backdrop, the Sufis' misconceptions about revelation remain a mystery, wrapped in the allure of their supposed divine insights. The connection between earth and heaven is nothing short of a mind-blowing experience for human consciousness. The descent of divine revelation from the realm of the infinite, delivered to a specific human among the masses, is a collision of two different worlds, two different dimensions. It's a phenomenon so sublime, so beyond words and comprehension, that it naturally ignites a deep-seated curiosity in us. Yet, understanding it is far beyond our reach. When asked about the "Ruh"—the spirit or the nature of revelation—the Quran simply states that it's a command from the Divine. The very fact that questions about the nature of revelation are met with such a terse response in the Quran is a clear indication that some mysteries are meant to remain just that—mysteries, beyond the grasp of human inquiry. But in those early centuries, things took a different turn. The interpretative traditions of the People of the Book began to cast a shadow over the Quranic exegesis. Storytellers, commentators, and scholars of earlier religions started to be treated as keepers of a valuable heritage. As the borders of the Islamic world expanded, believers found themselves engaging with different intellectual traditions, and the peace and prosperity of the era ushered in a flourishing of scholarly gatherings and debates. Amidst this intellectual bloom, even the once-untouchable concept of revelation—a phenomenon so sublime and beyond human

grasp—became a topic of discussion and debate. The Quran lays out the methods of revelation in no uncertain terms: direct communication between God and the prophet, messages delivered through the angel Gabriel, and divine insight descending upon the Prophet's heart. But in those early centuries, scholars weren't content to leave it at that. They let the concept of revelation spill beyond these defined boundaries. Suddenly, stories started circulating that in the beginning, revelation came to the Prophet Muhammad in the form of dreams. Some even went so far as to suggest that the Prophet didn't initially realize he was being called to prophethood until Waraqa bin Nawfal pointed it out. We're well aware of how certain hadith collections began to blur the lines, trying to weave together the nebulous, ethereal quality of dreams with the concrete, unshakeable truth of revelation.

The early debates about the nature of revelation did nothing to clarify this sublime phenomenon. Instead, they muddled the waters, creating confusion about the certainty and sublimity of revelation in people's minds. If true dreams have any link to revelation, and if these visions are to be believed, then it suggests that revelation didn't just end with the last Prophet. The Sufis weren't alone in building a world of insights and discoveries based on dreams, though they certainly capitalized on it the most. In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the entire edifice of Sufism is propped up on dreams and visions, a delicate construction of the ethereal and the elusive.

The early centuries of Islam were marked by a growing confusion among scholars and Hadith experts about the nature of revelation. This muddled understanding gave rise to the Shia concept of divinely appointed Imams, while the Sufis seized the opportunity to create an endless chain of saints. Whether it's the Shia belief in these divinely guided Imams or the Sunni tradition of saints, spiritual leaders, and mystical figures like the "Qutb" or "Rijal al-Ghayb," all these concepts only took root after the original idea of revelation was stretched and distorted. The truth is, many of the intellectual missteps in Islamic

thought stem from this altered view of revelation—a view that elevates vague and ambiguous experiences like visions, inspirations, and mystical insights to the status of supplemental sources of divine truth. This shift opened the door to a whole spectrum of spiritual interpretations, blurring the lines between what is divinely revealed and what is simply imagined.

If we were to truly accept the final revelation given to the Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate, unalterable document and see it as the complete expression of the final prophethood, the impact would be profound. Shia thought could realign with its original core, and the popular Sunni version of Islam—so deeply intertwined with Sufi orders and their influence—would quickly lose its relevance. But what's striking is that even those who profess belief in the finality of prophethood struggle to fully comprehend the implications of this belief. The roots of the altered concept of revelation run deep, embedded in both Shia and Sunni thought. When the shifting concepts of revelation began seeping into our revered texts in those early centuries, it set up an almost impossible task for a community that unconsciously canonizes this period as the golden age of the صحابه (Companions), تابعين (Successors), and تبع تابعين (Followers of the Successors). Critically examining and reassessing that era became a daunting challenge, especially in a context where all Muslims of these first three generations are uniformly venerated.

But here's the thing—those early centuries were also a hotbed of intellectual, scholarly, and political chaos, where believers had to navigate a landscape littered with impostors, liars, and agitators masquerading as Muslims. By draping this period in sanctity, we've ended up venerating not just the era's genuine wisdom, but also its misguided notions. We've conveniently ignored the fact that alongside the صحابه, تابعين, and تبع تابعين, there was a significant number of misguided souls whose deceptive intellectual influence inevitably seeped into the fabric of our traditions. As I sit here writing this, I can't pretend that my method of analysis and



interpretation is entirely free from the pull of contemporary trends, despite my best efforts. The truth is, it's almost impossible to escape the influence of the times we live in, no matter how hard we try.

Our almost obsessive reverence for the past has shackled our scholars, keeping them from thinking freely and independently. Even though we're acutely aware of our decline, we just can't seem to muster the courage to start anew. The entire Shia concept of Imamate feeds off the belief that, in the absence of the Prophet Muhammad, Allah has ordained a line of divinely appointed Imams to guide and lead the faithful. In Sunni thought, a similar idea has taken root, thanks to the influence of Sufi mysticism. According to this belief—and as Ibn Arabi boldly put it—the end of prophethood with the Prophet Muhammad was merely the end of its legislative aspect, not its spiritual essence.<sup>115</sup> In other words, the legislative side of prophethood ended with the Prophet Muhammad, but this belief suggests that "a form of prophethood without the power to legislate has been kept alive, with scholars as its heirs."<sup>116</sup> Whether it's the idea of legislative or non-legislative prophethood or the continuation of a divine line through appointed Imams, these concepts all rest on a shaky tradition that has seeped into both Shia and Sunni thought at various levels. In *Sahih Bukhari*, there's a clear rejection of the idea that anyone after the Prophet Muhammad could hold the status of a prophet or be divinely appointed in his absence. Yet, in *Kitab Al-Manaqib*, there's a hadith about Umar that states among the Israelites, there were not just prophets but also "Muhaddath"—individuals who received divine inspiration. It even suggests that if anyone in the Muslim community were to be a Muhaddath, it would have been Umar. On the surface, this seems to deny the concept of a Muhaddath, but the idea that a Muhaddath acts as the link between heaven and earth in the absence of a prophet has, through these narrations, established a lasting place in Shia Muslim thought. In *Usul al-Kafi*, there's mention of the phrase "ولا محدّث" being added after "وما أرسلنا من قبلك من رسول ولا نبي".<sup>117</sup> Sunni sources attribute this addition to the recitation of Ibn Abbas. The belief persists that a

Muhaddath's inspiration is seen as definitive and certain, further complicating the distinction between the finality of prophethood and the ongoing search for divine connection. The concept of the finality of prophethood is clear, but the real issue lies in how both Sunni and Shia sources handle the idea of a "Muhaddath." In Sunni texts, it's dismissed, while in Shia thought, it's embraced. Until both sides completely let go of this notion, they'll struggle to fully appreciate the true greatness of revelation. But that's easier said than done. Sufism has made the idea of supplementary revelation so mainstream that even the most clear-sighted thinkers are reluctant to outright reject the inspirations and insights of spiritual figures—even when those inspirations undermine the very concept of revelation itself.

If the Sufis had only stuck to debating words and meanings, it might have been easier to correct their course. But they didn't stop there—they introduced an entire system of supplementary revelation through visions and inspirations. Slowly but surely, the community's faith in these revelations became so deep that people began to see the inspired chants and practices of these figures as more potent than the Quran itself for living a life of piety, poverty, and trust in God. When even respected scholars start dividing knowledge into "علم معامله" (worldly knowledge) and "علم مكاشفه" (knowledge of spiritual unveiling),<sup>118</sup> with the belief that the latter isn't learned from books but through the company of mystics and is directly from God, it's no wonder that the door is wide open for all sorts of visions, inspirations, and revelations to take root. When scholars start believing that witnessing the "Alam al-Mithal"—the World of Similitudes—akin to the Prophet's Mi'raj, isn't just the domain of prophets but also within reach for the saints of the community,<sup>119</sup> it's only natural for the reverence for divine revelation and the eternal source of the Quran to fade. If ordinary people, through their own mujahada, muraqaba, and mukashafa—spiritual exertion, meditation, and mystical unveiling—can embark on journeys to the higher realms,<sup>120</sup> then how can the unmatched significance of the final revelation to the Prophet

Muhammad hold its ground? This becomes even more problematic when Sufis successfully convince people that what they see in their dreams is on par with what prophets witness while awake.<sup>121</sup> When a scholar like Ghazali starts believing that the pious can witness the unseen not just in dreams but even in their waking moments,<sup>122</sup> and when someone of his intellectual caliber falls into the confusion of thinking that the beautiful forms seen by prophets and saints—whether in dreams or awake—are like angels, serving as conduits for revelation and inspiration, it inevitably begs the question: what sets the revelation received by the last Prophet apart? What makes it truly superior?

Some of the most prominent Sufis took things even further, suggesting that the revelations received by the spiritually attuned sometimes appeared in written form. Ibn Arabi pushed the idea that certain Sufis received these divine messages directly from "Malak al-Ilham," the Angel of Inspiration, and when they woke from their dreams, they'd find the words already written on paper. He even recounted a story of a poor man in the sacred precincts of the Kaaba who supposedly received a written revelation, assuring him of his salvation from Hell. According to Ibn Arabi, whenever such a written message appears, it's to be seen as directly from God.<sup>123</sup> To elevate the status of saints' inspirations to the level of revelation, Ibn Arabi even claimed that angels descend upon both prophets and saints. The difference, he said, is that prophets see these angels with their own eyes during revelation, while saints perceive their presence through subtle signs.<sup>124</sup> While Ghazali didn't buy into the idea that angels descend during the inspirations received by saints, he didn't shy away from the notion that these inspirations are indeed from God. The Sufis didn't stop at claiming divine inspiration—they went even further, boldly asserting that they had access to divine secrets beyond the reach of angels and prophets. Some Sufis spoke of this esoteric knowledge, quoting Allah as saying, "هُوَ سِرِّي وَبَيْنَ "أَجْبَانِي وَأَوْلِيَانِي وَأَصْفِيَانِي أَوْدَعُهُ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ لَا يَطَّلِعُ عَلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ مُقَرَّبٌ وَلَا نَبِيٌّ مُرْسَلٌ".<sup>125</sup> In their view, this secret was so profound that if it were ever disclosed, it would

make prophethood seem almost irrelevant.<sup>126</sup> Some Sufis went as far as to claim that they possessed secrets so profound that if they were ever revealed, they could render the very essence of prophethood meaningless.<sup>127</sup>

The quest to unlock revelation through inspiration and mystical insight eventually led to claims of discovering divine secrets that were said to surpass even the status of prophethood. For those who believed they were privy to these divine mysteries, and for the scholars who validated such claims, the sacredness of divine revelation inevitably took a backseat. This mindset is perfectly encapsulated in Ghazali's endorsement of the Sufis' esoteric knowledge, where he says, "It is a secret from the secrets of Allah that He casts into the hearts of His beloved ones, a secret that no angel or human can access."<sup>128</sup> When the Sufis boldly declare, "خُذْتُ بَحْرًا وَوَقَفَ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ بِسَاحِلِهِ" ("I have taken a path in the ocean, while the prophets have remained on its shore"), it's clear they believe their inspirations and participation in divine secrets surpass even divine revelation. What's truly baffling, though, is how these mystical insights managed to eclipse the greatness of divine revelation in the minds of otherwise clear-thinking scholars. The shifting concepts of revelation have left their mark on some of the most influential figures in Islamic thought. Even those celebrated for intellectual renewal weren't immune to these confusions. Take Mujaddid Alf Thani, for instance—he went so far as to argue that after the Quran and Sunnah, *ilham* (inspiration) should be regarded as a third source of religious authority.<sup>129</sup> Shah Waliullah, a towering figure whose intellectual legacy looms large over Muslim thought in the Indian subcontinent, and who is often seen as the guardian of orthodox Islam, didn't just stop at conventional teachings. He saw the inspirations of saints as a legitimate alternative to revelation. In his view, there are two paths to reach God: one through divine revelation and the teachings of the prophets, and the other through the mystical insights and inspirations of the saints.<sup>130</sup> When inspiration was elevated to the status of revelation and gained

acceptance within orthodox Muslim thought, it opened the door for secondary and supplementary sacred texts to take root. For the Sufis, it became enough to lean on their own mystical experiences and revelations, rather than grounding their ideas in the Quran and Sunnah. The books they wrote, aimed at merging their foreign mysticism with the core of Islam, were all backed by these self-declared inspirations and spiritual insights. Even though the sacred writings of the Sufis clashed directly with the Quranic vision of life, the Sufis insisted that their books were divinely revealed, not the product of human learning. Ibn Arabi, for instance, claimed that *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* was revealed to him all at once, while Shah Waliullah described his spiritual treatise, *Hama'at*, as a direct transmission from God. Shah Waliullah went as far as to declare, without hesitation, that what he wrote in these mystical texts had nothing to do with intellect, reasoning, or scholarly debate. He said, "May God protect my inspired words from all these influences, so they don't get mixed up and create confusion between truth and falsehood."<sup>131</sup> Most Sufi books are revered as sacred, thanks to their supposed link to divinely inspired revelations. The truth is, if the religious legitimacy of these inspirations were ever seriously questioned, the entire edifice of Sufism would come crashing down. But it's not that simple. In this world, one inspiration often validates another, one dream lends credibility to the next. Take the story of Sirri al-Saqati, who asked Junayd of Baghdad if he had seen the Prophet Muhammad in a dream. When Junayd asked how he knew, Sirri replied that he had been graced with a dream of God Himself, who told him, "I have sent My beloved Muhammad to Junayd, commanding him to preach."<sup>132</sup> For the leading Sufis, talking about these kinds of dreams is practically routine. The idea of meeting the Prophet Muhammad in a dream and receiving his exalted teachings is a popular concept they've embraced. It's how they've kept their sense of superiority over ordinary Muslims, often claiming that their knowledge and mystical insights are the direct result of spiritual connection with the Prophet—something they say is beyond the reach of regular believers or traditional

scholars. It's the allure of these so-called divine inspirations that has filled the Muslim world with *awrad* and *wazaaif*—prayers and invocations supposedly revealed outside the Quran. These are said to be so potent that even the Quran itself can't compete with their effectiveness. And why wouldn't they be, when our saints claim that, unlike the Prophet Muhammad, who received revelation through Gabriel, they've directly encountered the Divine and collected this treasure of prayers firsthand? There's even a story about Hakim Tirmidhi, who claimed to have seen God in his dreams a thousand times, and each time he asked which prayer he should recite in the world, he was given the same specific one.<sup>133</sup> It's not just the extreme Sufis like Hakim Tirmidhi who've been swayed by the magic of mystical dreams; even the guardians of orthodox Islamic thought haven't escaped the seductive pull of these visions. Those who proclaimed themselves as spiritual saviors, like Mujaddid Alf Thani, or those deluded into thinking that the pen they held was actually the Prophet Muhammad's<sup>134</sup>—all these confusions have seeped into our collective consciousness through dreams and hallucinations. The supposed visions of the Prophet or revered saints in dreams have reshaped countless lives, steering them down paths of mistaken conviction. Many have spent their entire lives under the illusion that they were divinely appointed,<sup>135</sup> all because of those dream-like moments that blurred the line between reality and imagination.

In the beginning, Islamic thought had no room for the notion that the Prophet Muhammad or the spirits of saints could return to this world to assist the faithful. But the Sufis, with their mystical concept of union with the Divine after death, created a space for these dream-like inspirations to take hold. This shift in the understanding of revelation didn't happen in a vacuum—it's intertwined with the need to grasp the Quranic term *wali* and what it truly means. To understand how we got here, we need to unravel both the term and the phenomenon that allowed such sweeping changes to take root.

## Wali

In the Quranic framework, wali or wilayah isn't some divinely appointed title but a term used to draw a line between believers and non-believers. The Quran divides humanity into two fundamental groups: the friends of Allah (awliya' Allah) and the friends of Satan (awliya' al-shaytan). Verses like "والله ولي المؤمنين" (Aal-e-Imran: 68), "فقاتلوا اولياء الشيطان" (Araf: 27), "الله ولي الذين آمنوا" (Baqarah: 257), and "إن جعلنا الشياطين اولياء للذين" (Araf: 27) highlight this divide, splitting people into the party of Allah and the party of Satan based on their belief or disbelief. For those who have chosen to walk with Allah, the Quran offers a promise: "والله ولي المتقين"—God is their ally and protector, shielding them from fear and sorrow, as the verse says: "إلا أن اولياء الله لاخوف عليهم ولاهم يحزنون". Among the faithful, those who embrace piety are promised good news in both this life and the next: "لهم البشرى في الحياة الدنيا وفي الآخرة". For these pious souls, Allah's promise is unwavering: "لا تبدل لكلمات الله ذلك هو الفوز العظيم" (Yunus: 61-64). This is the Quran's vision of wilayah—a bond with the divine that guarantees success. The only requirement is that believers must continue to live with piety: "الذين آمنوا وكانوا يتقون".

In the Quranic vision of *wali*, there's no mention of a special group handpicked by Allah for His exclusive guardianship or companionship. Instead, this honor is granted to all believers who hold fast to piety. Wherever the word *wilayah* appears in the Quran, it's about protection and authority, not about conferring a special spiritual status.<sup>136</sup> The root *w-l-y* shows up around two hundred times in various forms, yet there's no hint that it refers to a divinely appointed role reserved for an elite few. Even in the time of the Prophet, the companions, and the early centuries of Islam, there's no trace of anyone being regarded as holding a unique position of wilayah among the faithful. The Sufi concept of *wali* emerged much later, during a time when the Sufis carved out a separate philosophical worldview, distinct from mainstream thought, and then

positioned themselves at the center of it, claiming a role in the cosmic order.

No matter the mystical powers attributed to a wali, the question remains: what truly qualifies someone, living or dead, as a wali? In the Quranic worldview, the final verdict on whether someone is a wali of Allah or a wali of Satan is reserved for the Day of Judgment. The Sufis, faced with this dilemma, came up with a clever workaround: only a wali can recognize another wali. This idea caught on, effectively silencing anyone outside the circle of *awliya'* from making judgments on the matter. To the Sufis, being a wali is a divinely appointed role, reserved for a select few. Ordinary believers are focused on achieving faith, while the elite pursue the lofty status of *wilayah*.<sup>137</sup> In the Quran, becoming a wali of Allah or being counted among His chosen requires a steadfast commitment to piety. But in Sufi thought, this requirement is conveniently set aside, allowing for the notion that one can be born a wali.

In earlier pages, we explored the concept of the *muhaddath*, which refers to someone who receives divine inspiration or inner knowledge, though not at the level of prophethood. In Sufi thought, the wali is seen as a kind of ongoing prophethood. The entire significance of a wali in this mystical worldview is rooted in the belief that, after the last Prophet's passing severed the link between heaven and earth, the saints reestablished that connection through their revelations and miracles. As Ibn Arabi put it, "Prophethood may have ended, but if *wilayah* were to end too, there would be nothing left, since wali is one of the names of Allah." Drawing from "اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا"—"Allah is the Protector of those who believe"—Ibn Arabi envisioned a wali as someone who embodies the attributes of Allah, who annihilates the self to unite with Him, and who achieves existence after annihilation. The idea of a wali as a sort of mini-god, endowed with a divine-like authority, stems from an anthropomorphic interpretation of a Hadith Qudsi found in *Sahih Bukhari*. The Hadith describes how, when a servant draws near to God,



God says, "I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks."<sup>138</sup> Taking a metaphorical statement and turning it into a literal truth—seeing the potential for divine qualities within pious individuals—became possible because the Sufis looked beyond the Quran to define the concept of a wali. Instead of grounding it in Islamic scripture, they drew from external sources where various Christian saints and Hindu deities were believed to hold cosmic responsibilities. This idea is echoed in the words attributed to Abdul Qadir Jilani: "وهو قوله في بعض كتبه: يا ابن آدم أنا الله لا" —"It is mentioned in some of the books, 'O son of Adam, I am Allah, there is no god but Me. I say to something 'Be' and it becomes. Obey Me, and you will also be able to say to something 'Be' and it will become.'"<sup>139</sup> This reveals that the Sufi concept of a wali is rooted in sources outside the Quran and Sunnah. Abdul Qadir Jilani, perhaps out of caution, didn't openly acknowledge these origins, simply stating that such ideas are found in certain heavenly books. The belief took hold that awliya' Allah, the friends of Allah, are superior to all creation after the prophets and messengers. Some Sufis even went so far as to claim that the rank of a wali surpasses that of prophethood. The role of a wali started to mirror that of a muhaddath or a priest among the Jews. As Ibn Arabi put it, "فالنبوة مقام عند الله يناله البشر" —"Prophethood is a status with Allah that humans can attain, reserved for the greatest among them. It is given to the law-giving prophet and to those who follow him."<sup>140</sup> Ibn Arabi also suggested that while awliya' may not be shuraka' fi al-nubuwwah—"partners in prophethood"—they are certainly shuraka' fi al-wilayah—"partners in wilayah." He didn't just claim the office of wilayah for himself; he also declared that Wilayah Muhammadiyah—the spiritual authority of Muhammad—was concluded with him.<sup>141</sup>

The Sufis took on the ambitious task of prying open the door of finality in prophethood—a door that countless false prophets had failed to budge throughout the centuries. They managed this not by claiming direct prophethood or messengership, but by cloaking their ambitions in the guise of wilayah. To legitimize the status of wilayah, they twisted verses like "ألا إن أولياء الله لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون" to suit their own narratives. By redefining wilayah with meanings outside the Quranic framework, they created the illusion that this concept was somehow connected to Quranic thought. This allowed the Sufis to achieve what countless false prophets could not. They elevated numerous saints to the rank of wali, weaving around each one extraordinary and unfathomable tales of controlling the universe. In doing so, they cast a shadow over a religion that was once illuminated by the brilliance of prophetic revelation, draping it instead in the darkness of mystical experiences.

By twisting fundamental Quranic terms, the Sufis cleverly created a Quranic foundation for their own mystical ideas. The focus of the faith shifted to a spirituality where pledging allegiance to a spiritual guide, obeying him without question, and blindly accepting his inspirations became the only paths to salvation. It was widely believed that without a guide, one was led by Satan: "من ليس له شيخ فشيخه إبليس"—"Whoever has no guide, his guide is Satan." Al-Qushayri echoed this sentiment, quoting Bayazid: "من لم يكن له أستاذ فإمامه شيطان"—"Whoever does not have a teacher, his leader is Satan."<sup>142</sup> With the overshadowing of divine revelation by the mystical insights of these spiritual figures, the fundamental aim of the faith had changed, leaving the Quran as a book of guidance to fade into irrelevance. The champions of this new spiritual life crafted a vision of spirituality that stepped outside the Quranic framework, promoting ideas that had no precedent in the earliest days of Islam. Concepts like bay'ah (allegiance),<sup>143</sup> wasilah (intercession),<sup>144</sup> taqwa (piety), tawakkul (trust in God), mujahada (spiritual struggle), tazkiyah (purification), shahid (martyr), visal (union), fatiha (recital), and ajr (reward) were

reinterpreted and assigned meanings that led to spiritual journeys far removed from anything the Quran ever described. The new spiritual allegiance, the quest for blessings from the spirits of living or deceased spiritual leaders, the extreme piety reserved for the elite by Sufis, and the practices of spiritual struggle and purification drawn from ancient monastic traditions—all of these were guided by Sufi texts and collections of sayings that were revered as divinely inspired at various times. These books, which the spiritually inclined swore by, were believed to offer abundant spiritual growth through their mystical methods of worship. The champions of this new spiritual life didn't just sideline the Quran as a book of guidance; through their mystical interpretations, they effectively rendered it irrelevant. The Sufi reinterpretations of the Quran led to the creation of a passive worldview that ultimately left the entire Muslim community paralyzed, trapped in a state of inaction.

While the Quran's emotional resonance was meticulously maintained, leading Sufis staunchly claimed their entire mystical framework drew directly from it. The reality is that Sufism—whether emerging from the Hurufi movement or those immersed in numerology and other esoteric practices—succeeded in reshaping Islam precisely because they preserved this emotional significance within their intellectual constructs. Sufism didn't merely position itself within the religious discourse; it claimed to unearth the very essence of divine servitude. This approach allowed the mystical interpretations and ideas conceived by these spiritual figures to gain significant traction and popularity. By maintaining the Quran's emotional impact, they lent their reinterpretations a veneer of legitimacy and profound allure.

The journey from discovering the essence of servitude to the direct experience of truth—a path the Sufis forged with their own invented rituals, ascetic practices, and mystical insights—was deeply shaped by Jewish and Christian influences. This influence arose from their attempt to interpret the Quran in the same manner Jewish scholars approached their scriptures. Had the Sufis adopted the prophetic way of reflecting on

the Quran, as the early Muslims did, they would never have ventured into these spiritual wildernesses in search of God. Nor would anyone have dared to say, "I do not worship a God whom I have not seen."<sup>145</sup>

In the Quran, the dialogue between Moses and God has long captivated Sufi thinkers, leading to the idea that it might be possible for a human to witness the divine essence. Moses was reimagined not just as a prophet but as a Sufi, desperate for a glimpse of divine light, even if that longing put his very existence at risk. Early Quranic commentators like Maqatil ibn Sulayman suggest that this mystical interpretation of Moses's experience began to take shape even in the early centuries, as some started viewing his story through a Sufi lens. Moses began to be seen not merely as a prophet but as someone uniquely privileged to step into the realms of divine illumination. The verses {كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا} and {وَنَادَيْنَاهُ مِنْ} (Maryam: 52) suggest a deeply personal dialogue, almost a whisper from God, as the word "Najyya" implies. Moses's plea on Mount Sinai, {رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ} (A'raf: 143), resonated with those who, reaching beyond the boundaries of prophethood, believed that an ordinary Sufi could achieve a direct encounter with God. The Sufis reimagined what happened next to Moses, transforming it into a manifesto for their mystical journey, bending the experience to align with their spiritual aspirations. In "Al-Tawasin," Hallaj reimagines Moses as a spiritual seeker whose journey is fraught with peril and hardship. The fire that appears along his path symbolizes these dangers. Some even suggest that Moses leaving his family behind before entering the Valley of Tuwa hints that celibacy is the ideal way of life for those pursuing the heights of spirituality. Hallaj draws a provocative conclusion from Moses's encounter: the divine voice emanating from the burning bush—a mere creation—suggests that God can speak through the created world. Hallaj took it a step further, boldly claiming that he was like the burning bush itself, a vessel through which God speaks. The experience in the Valley of Tuwa captivated even the more moderate Sufis, those who,

unlike Hallaj, stopped short of declaring themselves the mouthpiece of God. Take Al-Ghazali, for instance—he echoed this symbolic interpretation of Tuwa with nearly the same conviction. Moses, overwhelmed and fainting from the glimpse of God's radiance, as described in the verse {فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا} (A'raf: 143), is seen by Sufis as the ultimate experience on the path to divine truth, the final step they call "fana fi al-fana"—annihilation in the annihilation.

Recasting Moses's experience as that of a Sufi rather than a prophet had significant implications. It suggested that direct encounters with the divine were attainable for ordinary seekers, not just for prophets. This reinterpretation also deepened the Sufi fascination with the secretive mysticism and spiritual practices of the Jews, making their esoteric traditions all the more alluring. This is a key reason why Jewish scholars, particularly Jewish mystics, had such a profound influence on Sufi thought.

Moses's direct encounter with the divine is not just mentioned in the Quran but is given a prominence that outshines references to other prophets.<sup>146</sup> Sufis latched onto this, seeing in Moses's spiritual journey a blueprint for those longing for their own divine encounter. For those whose spiritual lives revolve around the pursuit of fana fi al-rabb (annihilation in God) and fana fi al-fana (annihilation in the annihilation), the life of the final Prophet and the revelation he received might seem less captivating. After all, it doesn't offer a clear strategy for such intense mystical experiences. For those yearning for a direct encounter with the divine, their cravings could only be fed by the secret knowledge and esoteric sources that had spun an entire web of mysticism under the guise of religion. In their quest for the ultimate truth, these spiritual seekers ignored the fundamental reality: Moses was a prophet. His privilege to step into the Valley of Tuwa, retreat on Mount Sinai, and engage in a dialogue with the Divine was a special grace from God, reserved exclusively for prophets. The visions, revelations, and meditations of ordinary people lack the power to fulfill such a longing for

the divine essence. As the Quran states, {لا تدركه الأبصار وهو يدرك الأبصار وهو}—"No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is the Subtle, the All-Aware."

The burning desire for a direct encounter with the divine and the quest for a deeper spiritual life led the mystics to carve out an entirely new way of being. Suddenly, the goals of the faithful shifted; love for God eclipsed the idea of unconditional servitude, becoming the central obsession of thought and action. The mystics didn't just want to love—they wanted to be consumed by it, seeing this fiery passion as the ultimate purpose of life. The promises of divine support, companionship, closeness, and pleasure that once came through worship were now claimed by the mystics as rewards for following their own self-fashioned path of love. This radical shift didn't just change practices—it turned the Muslim worldview on its head. Their attitude toward the world morphed into something more akin to mystics who dismissed life as nothing but a meaningless charade. Like Hindu yogis, sannyasis, and ascetics on their quest for moksha and nirvana, the faithful began to see the world as a mere illusion, believing that the only way to safeguard their spiritual lives was to distance themselves from it. This retreat from the world and its attachments bred a kind of resignation, a desire to escape from the very fabric of life itself. The Sufi worldview led the Muslim community to voluntarily relinquish the leadership role it was destined to hold until the end of time, as designated by the Quran. It's the very scenario the Quran warned against: {وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ رِعَائِهَا} (Al-Hadid: 27). By retreating from worldly affairs, the Muslim community effectively cleared the way for false powers to take control. In this context, Sufism almost orchestrated the final rites for the intellectual and political decline of the Muslims, signing off on their self-imposed exile from the stage of history.

What was left of the true faith had now morphed into a cocktail of foreign ideas and beliefs, with only a faint trace of Islam lingering. This

new religion, wrapped in the guise of the old, made it hard for anyone to grasp just how dire the situation had become. The Sufis, with their clever justifications, leaned on the Quranic interpretations of their predecessors to defend their every deviation in thought and practice. Outwardly, they displayed a fervent devotion to the idea of prophethood, with every mystic or spiritually inclined person seeing a vision of the Prophet in their dreams as the ultimate goal. Piety took on an extreme edge—new forms of prayers and fasts were invented almost daily. Strange new chants and practices emerged, turning spiritual journeys to higher realms into what seemed like a casual stroll for the mystics. Many mystics penned accounts of their spiritual journeys through the realms of the soul, comparing their experiences to the Mi'raj. These writings created an illusion that their every effort was dedicated to spreading Islam and teaching the art of divine servitude. This veneer of religiosity and spirituality allowed their deviations in thought and practice to escape the harsh scrutiny that had condemned heresies in the past. Sure, there were always critics of the Sufi interpretation of Islam, but these objections often amounted to little more than intellectual sparring or theoretical disputes. Traditional scholars were constantly accusing each other of losing the true path, so their disagreements with philosophical Sufism didn't seem all that significant. But when the Sufis gained the remarkable support of Al-Ghazali, it was like a breath of life into their version of faith. There's more to say on this, and it's coming up.

Sufism, which became a widely embraced religion thanks to the relentless efforts of figures like Abdul Qadir Jilani and Ibn Arabi, was essentially an imported, foreign concept within Islam. Its connection to Islam was largely circumstantial, rooted in the fact that it grew up within the Muslim community. It borrowed Islamic religious culture, worship practices, and the Quran—though for Sufis, the Quran was more of an emotionally charged spiritual document than a strict guide. This borrowing created the illusion that the version of faith Sufism offered was just another, more accessible interpretation of Islam. On the surface,

it seemed like something entirely different was happening. The religion that the mystics introduced under the guise of Sufism didn't just tweak the Quranic worldview—it completely overhauled it, allowing polytheism to dig its claws into what was once a purely monotheistic framework. And the irony? It was all done in the name of deep religiosity and devotion to God. To grasp just how thick and all-encompassing the veil that the Sufis draped over the Quran really was, you have to dive into the core beliefs of Sufism and the cosmic system they built.



## Quran vs. the Religion of Sufism

Let's start with the concept of monotheism. For the Sufis, the oneness of God is an idea so profound that it can't be captured by human language—it's beyond words. At first glance, this might seem like a deep, philosophical stance. Sure, philosophically speaking, the true essence of monotheism might be beyond human comprehension. But for the faithful, monotheism needs to be something they can grasp, something that fits within the limits of human understanding, as much as God has chosen to reveal through His divine message. The Quran's concept of monotheism, as clearly stated by God in verses like {شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ}, wasn't enough to satisfy the mystics' relentless spiritual curiosity. The intellectual break that the Sufis made, which can be traced back to texts like *Risala Qushayriya* and *Kitab al-Luma*, started with this very question: how do you grasp an indescribable concept of monotheism on a level only the spiritually elite can reach? In their quest for a direct encounter with the divine, the Sufis wandered into the valleys of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of being), driven by a thirst that the Quranic statements simply couldn't quench. The intellectual confusion among early Sufis was fueled in part by the philosophical debates that deeply influenced the thinking of their time. Just as Greek philosophy and theological discussions left their mark on Islamic jurisprudence, the Sufis weren't immune to these intellectual currents either. You can see this influence in their writings, where the search for deeper meanings in religion is clearly shaped by these philosophical debates. Someone once asked Shibli what monotheism is, and he replied that it's something words can't capture. He said, if you try to describe monotheism, you're a heretic; if you point to it, you're acknowledging two gods. If you stay silent, you're clueless, and if you think you've attained it, you've actually achieved nothing.

Gesturing toward it makes you an idol worshiper, and talking about it shows your ignorance. If you think you're close to it, you're actually far from it, and if you believe you've found it, you've really just lost it.<sup>147</sup> In Shibli's view, monotheism is beyond human grasp—whatever you think it is, it's just something you've made up in your own mind.

These philosophical debates didn't just leave the questioner with more answers—they left them with bigger questions. The mental jolt from the Sufis' philosophical interpretations was seen as a testament to their lofty thinking. It was as if the Sufis' intricate reasoning filled the emptiness left by the jurists' plain interpretations. Then someone came along and gave Sufism a new twist, arguing that creation has no place in God's oneness, that no one but God Himself can express His unity. Pure monotheism, they said, belongs to God alone, and everything else is just a shadow.<sup>148</sup> Shibli went even further, insisting that anyone who tries to imagine monotheism or attribute qualities to God hasn't even caught the scent of what true monotheism is.<sup>149</sup>

The Sufis' take on monotheism was shaped more by the philosophical debates of their time than by Quranic insight. The problem was that the Sufis viewed these intricate ideas as the pinnacle of understanding monotheism. They saw the traditional scholars' concept as a lesser version, one they believed was still clouded with doubts. In contrast, the Sufis claimed their idea of monotheism wasn't just rooted in intellect but was validated through direct spiritual experience. Some mystics even promised that through specific ascetic practices, a believer could witness divine manifestations so overwhelming that all other existences would fade away, leaving only the true essence behind.<sup>150</sup> Ghazali talked about a level of monotheism among the devout where the seeker sees only the One and loses all awareness of themselves.<sup>151</sup> But it didn't end there. Some Sufis described an even deeper state where the seeker becomes so immersed in the attributes of God that they lose all sense of self. Then, they go beyond even the divine attributes to directly experience the essence of God. At that point, they can no longer even perceive their own

annihilation because they've been completely absorbed into the existence of the Divine. As Qushayri puts it, "فالأول فناؤه عن نفسه وصفاته ببقائه بصفات الحق، " —first, they annihilate their own self and attributes by aligning with the attributes of God. Then they are annihilated from the attributes of God by witnessing the Divine. Finally, they are annihilated from even witnessing their own annihilation as they are entirely consumed in the existence of the Divine.<sup>152</sup> This is the high point of Sufi thought—the idea that the deeper one delves into annihilation, the more profound their understanding becomes. To reach this imagined summit of monotheism, the Sufis devised all sorts of spiritual exercises, believing these practices could elevate a seeker to this lofty state. It was in this state of annihilation that some Sufis claimed to have discovered the truth of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence), a concept that turned the entire Quranic worldview on its head.

In their pursuit of a deeper understanding of monotheism, the Sufis got swept up in theological debates that eventually muddled the waters, hiding the oneness of God within the tangled ideas of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence). On the surface, it might have seemed like these intricate concepts were still rooted in the Islamic worldview. But take, for example, the phrase "أنا بلا أنا ونحن بلا نحن" ("I am without I, and we are without we")—it was meant to convey that a person, while performing actions, is completely unaware of them. When someone said, "أنا من أهوي " ("I am who I love, and who I love is me, so when you see me, you see us"),<sup>153</sup> it wasn't just a poetic musing—it muddled the waters around the nature of God and hinted at a deep sense of inadequacy. The Sufis had another phrase, "هو بلا هو" ("He is without being He"),<sup>154</sup> which suggests that God is beyond all definition, that true monotheism is something entirely different. It implies that while God is indeed who He is, no one can truly express or write about His essence. These discussions seem to draw directly from the Quranic verse {لَنْفِدَ الْبَحْرُ}

{قِيلَ أَنْ تَنْفَعَهُ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي}, as if it was echoing in the minds of the Sufi scholars like a mantra. These mystics, much like the other Muslim intellectuals of their time, were heavily influenced by theological interpretation. They reveled in the art of expressing simple truths in such a dramatic way that it left their listeners spellbound, making them feel as though a new world of meaning had just been unveiled before them. For example, they took the verse {إِنَّهُ يُبْدِي وَيُعِيدُ} and turned it into the phrase "بادي بلا بادي" ("apparent without being apparent"),<sup>155</sup> as if they were unlocking a hidden depth that no one else could see. Someone once said, "وقتي مسرمد",<sup>156</sup> likely trying to convey that the ocean they've tapped into is boundless, with no shore in sight. These intricate theological musings, though they took some inspiration from verses that speak to the impossibility of capturing God's essence, ultimately led the Sufis down the path of trying to define the very thing the Quran warned against—the undefinable. It's as if they were so caught up in their own metaphysical depths that they lost sight of the very limits they were warned not to cross.

Among the Sufis, the understanding of monotheism was seen through a different lens when it came to the spiritual elite (أخص الخواص). While the common folk grasped monotheism in straightforward terms, the Sufis believed that the true secrets of God's oneness—what they referred to as *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence)—could only be accessed through a deeper spiritual insight (معرفة), something beyond ordinary knowledge. This wasn't for just anyone; these were mysteries reserved for those on a higher spiritual plane. As such, it became a widely accepted belief among Sufis that these truths should be kept hidden from the masses. They even went as far as to claim that the calamities that befell previous communities were a result of exposing these sacred secrets. The secrecy surrounding this fundamental belief in Sufism led the Sufis into a kind of double life. They became the keepers of a truth they couldn't openly share. It's a situation reminiscent of the Jewish mystics, who believed the hidden meanings of the Torah should be kept away from the

masses, taught only in whispers, and never to more than one person at a time.

Unlike the Quranic concept of monotheism, which insists that "nothing is like Him" (كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ), the Sufi interpretation can blur the lines between God and the universe so completely that God's distinct existence seems to vanish. When the belief takes root that everything in the universe is merely an extension of God and that nothing exists outside of Him, the distinction between truth and falsehood begins to evaporate. This leads to a reality where a Sufi might claim that Pharaoh was right in declaring "I am your supreme lord" (أَنَا رَبُّكُمْ الْأَعْلَى) because, in their view, Pharaoh wasn't separate from God's essence—he was simply another form in which God appeared.<sup>157</sup>

Existential philosophy posits that individuality is a mere illusion and that nothing in the universe stands apart. When Hallaj kicked off his letter to his disciple with the phrase "From the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate" (مِنَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ), he wasn't just making a poetic flourish. He was declaring that everything written was directly from God, with his hand simply being a conduit for divine will. Hallaj's radical vision of monotheism, which he framed as the problem of unity, drove him to claim a god-like authority. He didn't just flirt with divinity—he boldly proclaimed himself the force behind the deluge of Noah's people and the destruction of 'Ad and Thamud.<sup>158</sup> Some of the great Sufis, like Ibn Arabi, had a radically different take on divinity. They suggested that when God enters a person's being, the external facade remains that of the individual, yet internally, the person becomes God. So, when the Quran says, "And Allah took Ibrahim as a friend" (وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا), it's not just about Ibrahim being close to God; it's about a complete absorption into God's essence, or vice versa. In this mystical framework, the lines between servant and deity blur to the point of vanishing. Ibn Arabi even twisted the verse "Have you seen the one who takes his desires as his god?" (أَفَرَأَيْتَ) (مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ), claiming that worshiping anything—be it personal desires

or otherwise—is fundamentally the same as worshiping God. In this view, when there is no real difference between God and servant, and both are caught up in the same divine unity, the Quranic idea of servitude becomes utterly irrelevant. So, for some of the grand Sufis, reaching that transcendent pinnacle means worship and rigorous asceticism become superfluous. Take Bayazid Bastami, for instance. When God summoned him and said, "My servant, people wish to see you," Bayazid didn't just ask for the usual divine favor. No, he requested to be cloaked in God's singular essence, to be elevated into the very fabric of divine oneness. He wanted people, when they looked at him, to declare that they had seen God. In that ultimate moment, Bayazid yearned for a divine reality so pure that he himself would vanish entirely from sight.<sup>159</sup> In the dizzying heights of Sufi mysticism, there's this wild idea where God and man merge into a singular entity, a state so transcendent it's almost like a cosmic vanishing act. The person melts away, leaving only the divine essence. This ultimate surrender, or "annihilation in annihilation," is the pinnacle of mystical knowledge for Sufis. It's the moment when they throw out phrases like "Subhani ma a'zam sha'ni" ("Glory be to Me, how great is My status") or "Ma fi jubbati illa Allah" ("There is nothing in my cloak except God"). It sounds utterly off the charts, and sure, it may seem like sheer madness—a kind of Sufi overreach they call "shath" or ecstatic utterance. Yet, despite these audacious claims, Sufis hold steadfastly to the belief that their sense of divine oneness is profoundly meaningful. Dato Ganj, for example, interprets Bayazid Bastami's declaration "Subhani ma a'zam sha'ni" as God cloaked in the guise of a servant, making a statement about the veiled divinity within the human form.<sup>160</sup>

Existentialist thought, with all its seductive allure, never quite managed to secure its place as a legitimate interpretation of monotheism. Yet, its insidious influence has perpetually loomed over our religious consciousness. This unorthodox notion of monotheism sparked a wave of popular poetry in Eastern languages, infiltrating religious gatherings, Sufi circles, and devotional songs, deeply embedding itself into the

Muslim psyche.<sup>161</sup> Even the most steadfast scholars, who devoted their lives to repudiating the "Unity of Existence," found themselves unable to fully extricate themselves from its effects. Take Alauddin Samnani (d. 736 AH), for example. In his opposition to the "Unity of Existence," he proposed the concept of "Unity of Witnessing"—an idea that, while not equating the universe to God, still acknowledges its shadow. As we move forward, Shah Waliullah tried to merge these two concepts, framing them as nothing more than terminological differences. Here's the twist: despite being a beacon of compromise between the visible and the hidden realms of thought, and despite being revered by everyday Muslims for his allegiance to outward legalism, Shah Waliullah found himself entangled in the web of "Ana al-Haqq"—the very idea he was striving to transcend. Although he rejected the notion of "Unity of Existence," his other theories appear to flirt with this very idea. He posits that through frequent voluntary prayers, a divine light infiltrates the soul via angels. This light becomes the soul's lifeline, its entire existence hinging on this divine illumination, effectively turning it into the soul's sustaining force.<sup>162</sup> The notion of divine light permeating a person and enveloping their soul is basically a rehash of what other traditions call "Divine Incarnation." Shah Waliullah spins this concept with unfamiliar jargon, yet he grounds his ideas in a Quranic metaphor: {نور كمشكوة فيها مصباح}. To bolster his argument, he even digs up a dubious Quranic verse attributed to Abbas: "مثل نوره في قلب مومن كمشكوة فيها مصباح" (The example of His light in the heart of a believer is like a niche with a lamp). It's like saying that divine light in a believer's heart is as illuminating as a lamp nestled in a niche, casting its glow with serene assurance.<sup>163</sup>

The stark truth is that Sufis, in their fervent search for a deeper grasp of divine unity, inflated their own esoteric interpretations to such an extent that they overshadowed the Quranic vision of unity. Their efforts to anchor the concepts of وحدة الوجود "Unity of Existence" and وحدة الشهود "Unity of Witnessing" in the Quran led them into a quagmire of

distortion and misinterpretation. Ibn Arabi, whose reverence bordered on idolatry, was so sacrosanct that even his most blatant heresies were brushed off as mere eccentricities rather than fundamental deviations. Admitting otherwise would have felt like a profound betrayal of their very faith.<sup>164</sup> The harsh reality was that the entire doctrine of Unity of Existence blatantly contradicted the Quranic concept of unity. So, while some leading scholars maintained a superficial distance from Ibn Arabi, they were too timid to confront his heretical ideas head-on. Take Shah Waliullah, for instance, who is famous for his attempts to reconcile the concepts of Unity of Existence and Unity of Witnessing. In his mystical writings, he reveals a rather extreme existential bent. In *Anfas al-Arifin*, he tells a story about his uncle's spiritual experience that sounds like it could come straight out of a fantasy. His uncle, while focusing on divine names and attributes, saw beyond the traditional 99 names and into an infinite expanse of divine attributes. The boundaries of reality seemed to dissolve as his uncle imagined himself as both the creator and destroyer of the universe. Shah Waliullah claims that such transcendental states are routine for the greatest saints of the highest spiritual order.<sup>165</sup> Shah Waliullah recounts a tale about his father that reads like a passage from a mystical novel. A group of seekers, on a quest for a divine vision, found themselves in the presence of his father during prayer time. They chose him as their imam, a moment that should have been routine but took a twist into the extraordinary. After the prayer, his father, with a touch of knowing irony, asked what they were so fervently pursuing. Their answer? The Divine itself. His father's response was a revelation: "I am the very One you seek." In a dramatic turn of events, the seekers rose and lined up to shake his hand.<sup>166</sup> This story starkly illustrates how profoundly the distorted concept of divine unity had ensnared the souls of both the pious and the philosophical, blurring the lines between devotion and delusion.





## Prophethood vs. Haqeeqat-e-Muhammadi

Once Sufi thought veered away from a strict monotheistic paradigm, it wasn't long before other essential doctrines began to unravel. The belief that Muhammad ﷺ is the final prophet and that he completed the divine message is crucial; even the slightest deviation could plunge Muslim belief into the same errors that plagued earlier communities. The Quran made it crystal clear that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ embodies both human and prophetic dimensions. This explicit definition was meant to anchor believers, ensuring that they do not lose sight of the profound significance of his role, even in the face of any temptations of undue glorification or distortion through history. The Sufis have managed to simultaneously over-inflate and undermine the role of prophethood. On one hand, they've turned the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ into something of a divine figure, proclaiming that the entire universe is nothing more than a reflection of his light, asserting that he is the essence of existence itself. According to Sufi teachings, he was the first creation, a cosmic beacon whose light ignited everything. They even quote Hadiths that claim, "أول ما خلق الله نوري" ("The first thing Allah created was my light"), or "كنت نبيا وآدم بين الماء والطين" ("I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay"). Yet, paradoxically, they also strip this exalted role down, equating it with the status of ordinary Sufis and saints, diluting its significance.

In the mystical Sufi worldview, the divine genesis began with the creation of Muhammad's light, or what they call the Reality of Muhammad. This view holds that the Prophet ﷺ was both the primordial source of creation and its ultimate end. He embodies the First Intellect

and the Light of Prophethood. This light, which flowed through all prophets from Adam onwards, culminated in him. Essentially, the Light of Muhammad existed even before the manifestation of divine names and attributes, and before the inception of time and space itself. But the story doesn't end there. In the world of Sufism, the Reality of Muhammad isn't just a starting point—it's the very essence of the first descent of divine presence. When Allah decided to make Himself known, He first took shape as the Reality of Muhammad. This Reality continued to manifest through various forms until it culminated in the complete and final embodiment of Muhammad ﷺ. Sufis took the verse {لا نفرق بين أحد من رسله}

(We do not distinguish between any of His messengers) to mean that the divine نور, or light, has been the same across all prophets from Adam to Muhammad, insisting that no real difference exists between them. To them, this Reality of Muhammad is not just central but the very axis around which all cosmic and temporal laws revolve.<sup>167</sup> They elevate the Reality of Muhammad to the status of the ultimate cause of all causes, the primordial source from which everything else springs and revolves.

Sufis posit that the first divine revelation was made in the Muhammadian realm, which they see as the initial stage of the descent from the First Cause. Consequently, the Prophet Muhammad's ascension (Mi'raj) is portrayed as a deeply spiritual connection. The Quranic reference to "the two bows' length" (قَاب قَوْسَيْنِ) is interpreted by Sufis as the point where divine unity and the sense of the infinite converge. They assert, "This represents the pinnacle of Muhammad's ascension and spiritual insight, where the two bows fused through the overwhelming intensity of divine revelation, achieving the state of annihilation in God (Fana fi Allah)."<sup>168</sup> In the world of Sufism, the Muhammadian reality isn't just a concept; it's considered the very first stage of divine descent. Picture it: the divine essence, transcending all realms, first materialized in the Muhammadian form. From there, it was reintroduced into the reality of Adam, reaching the zenith of its descent into existence.<sup>169</sup> This descent, sliced into six distinct stages by the Sufis, centers on the Muhammadian

light. It's not merely a mystical framework but a grand existential philosophy that extreme Sufis have elevated to a divine science. They've woven this notion into a cosmic narrative, making it the supposed fulcrum around which the universe revolves.<sup>170</sup>

Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya is not just a concept—it's the beating heart of the universe, the pulse that drives everything. The Sufis believe that this very essence was breathed into Adam, making us, humans, not just beings but miniature universes, reflections of the grand cosmos. In this cosmic mirror, Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya is the cornerstone, the bedrock on which Haqiqat-e-Insaniya, the reality of our very existence, stands. Throughout history, the mystical Sufis have made bold claims—assertions of divinity that shake the foundations of ordinary belief. But these claims are not born from delusion; they are deeply rooted in the understanding of Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya. They see the human soul as tethered to this divine reality, a spark from the first flash of God's essence. If you strip away the complex terminology and elaborate metaphors, what you're left with is this: the essence that shone through the person of Muhammad was nothing less than the ultimate expression of Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya—the Reality of Muhammad in its most perfected form. Some Sufis, not content with that term, crafted the concept of Insan-e-Kamil—the Perfect Human—and with it, the bold idea that this Perfect Human is the axis on which the entire universe spins, the cornerstone of existence from the dawn of time to its end. And they didn't stop there; they insisted that this Insan-e-Kamil continues to manifest in different forms across the ages, a timeless presence in a world that constantly changes.<sup>171</sup>

In the Sufi paradigm, the lines between God, Muhammad, and the miracle-working saints blur until they're almost indistinguishable. The popular verse:

وہی جو مستویٰ عرش تھا، خدا ہو کر      اتر پڑا ہے مدینے میں مصطفیٰ ہو کر

"He who ruled the heavens in Divine embrace,

Came down to Medina, in a mortal grace."

lays this idea out in the open, without a hint of subtlety, and it's no wonder that it sends shockwaves through the minds of ordinary believers. But when this very concept is dressed up in Sufi jargon—wrapped in phrases like Noor-e-Mohammadi (the Light of Muhammad) or Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya (the Reality of Muhammad)—most people don't even flinch. They don't realize they're staring straight into the face of what could be seen as a deeply unsettling blasphemy, because the words sound too mystical, too poetic, to be anything but sacred.

They say that once, Muhammad (PBUH) turned to Gabriel and asked a question that hung heavy in the air: where do you get these messages from, and have you ever seen God with your own eyes? Gabriel, almost shrinking back, confessed that God always speaks from behind a veil, and that he, with all his celestial might, had never dared to gaze upon the Divine. But Muhammad wasn't one to settle for half-answers. He told Gabriel to lift the veil and see for himself. And here's where it gets surreal: Muhammad was tying his turban as he said this. So, Gabriel ascended to the highest heights, pulled back the veil on the Divine Throne, and what did he see? No one but Muhammad himself, calmly finishing the last wrap of his turban.<sup>172</sup> And this isn't just a one-off tale. There's another where, during the night of ascension—Mi'raj—Muhammad lifts the veil, expecting to meet God face to face, only to find that it's his own reflection staring back at him. These stories, with their almost dizzying blend of the mystical and the profound, are the kind that make you question everything you thought you knew about divinity.

The Sufis took Muhammad (PBUH) and wove him directly into the fabric of Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya—the Reality of Muhammad—suggesting that he was inseparable from the Divine Essence. They went further, promoting the idea that the entire cosmos operates on the energy of Ruh-e-Mohammadi (the Spirit of Muhammad) or Noor-e-Mohammadi (the Light of Muhammad). But in doing so, they also brought the lofty status of prophethood down to the level of ordinary saints and mystics.

Ibn Arabi, never one to shy away from bold ideas, suggested that from Adam to Muhammad (PBUH) and then to the countless saints who followed, what they all carried was just a fragment of this Noor-e-Mohammadi. According to him, it is this light that grants saints their cosmic influence. He took it even further, claiming that when a Qutb (the spiritual axis) appears, the First Intellect itself pledges allegiance, followed by every being in the heavens and on earth, the wind, the jinn, and the elemental forces.<sup>173</sup> Through the Sufi lens, the hadith "أول ما خلق الله العقل" ("The first thing God created was the intellect") takes on a whole new meaning. They argue that this First Intellect is nothing but Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya—the Reality of Muhammad—manifesting across the spectrum of existence, from prophets to saints to the Qutb (the spiritual axis). The Qutb is such a towering figure that even Muhammad (PBUH), and by extension Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya, which is essentially a mirror of the Divine Essence, is compelled to pledge allegiance to him. The Qutb holds a status so exalted that, in the Sufi imagination, even God steps back from the role of the ultimate ruler. Ibn Arabi didn't hold back—he claimed that from Adam to Muhammad, there have been 20 Qutbs. And sometimes, he took it a step further, suggesting there was only ever one Qutb from Adam to Muhammad, the sacred spirit of Muhammad (PBUH) itself, guiding all prophets, messengers, and other Qutbs. Yet, Ibn Arabi also wrote about meeting the Qutb of his own time, as if this cosmic hierarchy was something you could experience firsthand, in the flesh.<sup>174</sup>

Ibn Arabi didn't just claim that there's a Qutb—a spiritual axis—in every era; he took it further, asserting that when a new Qutb emerges, the authority of the previous one is nullified.<sup>175</sup> To understand this, you need to consider his earlier assertion that the Ruh-e-Mohammadi (Spirit of Muhammad) is what flows through all these Qutbs. In this framework, Ibn Arabi effectively lowered Muhammad (PBUH), the final prophet, to a position beneath the Qutb. But he didn't stop there; he elevated the role of Qutb above prophethood, opening the door for new spiritual leaders

to rise in each era. In this view, Muhammad (PBUH) wasn't just a singular figure—he was dispersed throughout the cosmos as Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya or Noor-e-Mohammadi. Meanwhile, the Qutb assumed a godlike role, taking control of the universe itself. This idea quickly gained traction, leading many to see the Qutb as the ultimate spiritual refuge, shifting their devotion from the Lord of the Universe to the Qutb of the universe, particularly Abdul Qadir Jilani, who was believed to wield so much power that even the sun wouldn't rise without first paying him homage.<sup>176</sup>

The concept of Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya and the intricate interpretations of Tanzilat-e-Sitta<sup>177</sup> were really just attempts to infuse existential thought with an Islamic veneer. But once the grip on monotheism loosens, and doubts creep in about the finality of prophethood, the human mind starts inventing gods of all kinds. This is what happened with the Sufis. By fragmenting God into layers of descent and elevating spiritual figures to divine status through Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya, Sufi thought quickly descended into a kind of paganism. Alongside the concept of the Qutb emerged the notion of Rijal al-Ghaib<sup>178</sup>—the hidden men—who were believed to possess mysterious, almost supernatural powers. In a bold shift, these spiritual figures essentially sidelined God, constructing an elaborate cosmic hierarchy that included Qutb, Ghawth, Abdal, Awtad, Nujaba, and Nuqaba.<sup>179</sup> In this imagined order, where the Qutb al-Aqtab and his associates supposedly governed the universe, where fresh revelations were thought to continue, where the spirits of the dead could return to aid their followers, and where mystics were believed to have the power to extinguish Hell with a single spit,<sup>180</sup> the concept of the final revelation and the last prophet began to feel like an outdated relic. Just as the intricate layers of jurisprudence around the Quran gave rise to a new class of religious scholars, akin to rabbis and monks, the Sufis went a step further, elevating their spiritual leaders to a status of shared divine authority. These individuals, who claimed to have glimpsed the Divine, who had

ascended to the mystical heights of Fana fi Allah (annihilation in God) and Baqa bi Allah (subsistence in God), began to see themselves as deserving of absolute submission from others. And they didn't stop there—they embraced and even encouraged the practice of being prostrated to by their followers, ordinary human beings like themselves.<sup>181</sup>

## The Era of the Sufi Qurans

To legitimize this new cosmic order, the need for fresh revelations and divine inspiration became inevitable. Sufi thought, having strayed far from the Quranic paradigm, was building its ideological foundation on foreign ground, where the belief in the finality of prophethood had all but dissolved. False prophets, disguised as Qutbs and saints, were proclaiming new divine insights and revelations, claiming these visions were being unveiled to them. In such a climate, the creation and compilation of new sacred texts seemed almost effortless—a natural progression for a belief system already rewriting its own rules. The truth is, if the Quran had been truly accepted as the final and eternal revelation, and if the Sufis hadn't undermined the finality of prophethood under the guise of spiritual authority, we wouldn't have seen Sheikh Abdul Qadir elevated to the status of Ghaus-e-Azam, nor would Sheikh Ibn Arabi's so-called divine books have gained traction. The Muslim world wouldn't be caught up in the endless calls for a Mujaddid or a Mahdi to emerge. There wouldn't be talk of an Alfi Mujaddid, and no one would dare to claim the title of Qaim al-Zaman, the one supposedly embodying all the spiritual connections of the Sufi orders. And certainly, no one would have had the audacity to suggest that the spiritual blessings bestowed upon certain individuals are anything more than echoes, shadows, and mere reflections of prophethood.<sup>182</sup>

When the nature of revelation became muddled, it created a wide opening for mystics claiming divine insight. Suddenly, the words of existential mystics—from Hallaj to Shah Waliullah—were seen as having a direct connection to the heavens. Shah Waliullah, for instance, asserted about Abdul Qadir: "إن الشيخ عبدالقادر له شعبة من السريان في العالم وذلك أنه لما مات صار " "Indeed, Sheikh Abdul Qadir



has a connection with the cosmic flow because, after his death, he took on the form of celestial beings and became infused with the existence that permeates the entire universe").<sup>183</sup> Manazir Ahsan Gilani pushed this further, suggesting that the secrets Ibn Arabi revealed were not just beyond the reach of ordinary scholars but were revelations he was compelled to share, as if not doing so would have led to his persecution.<sup>184</sup> It wasn't just the great sheikhs who held these beliefs—Shah Waliullah took it even further. He believed that those with strong spiritual faculties (Ahl-e-Istilah) could be graced with prophetic knowledge, see the angels of the highest heavens, uncover the mysteries of worship, and even have insights into the afterlife.<sup>185</sup> And because Shah Waliullah himself belonged to this spiritual circle, he spoke of his familiarity with the secrets of the unseen as if it were part of everyday conversation.<sup>186</sup>

The use of terms like *Kashf* (mystical unveiling) and *Ilham* (inspiration) to suggest that revelation was still ongoing led to the belief that Sufis like Abdul Qadir and Ibn Arabi were part of an unbroken prophetic chain. People began to see these mystics as continuing the faith that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had brought. Shah Waliullah even claimed that through these great Sufis, the path to the First Source—God—had become more accessible, with their blessings illuminating both the heavens and the earth.<sup>187</sup> The ambiguities introduced by these established scholars paved the way for spiritual figures to claim their own divine inspiration. Soon enough, new collections of "revealed" books began to surface among Muslims—some wrapped in dense philosophical prose, others woven into captivating poetry. But regardless of their form, these books quickly became central to the spiritual life of their followers, reshaping how they connected with the divine.

*Fusus al-Hikam* and *Futuh al-Makkiyah* were never meant to be recited like holy texts; their labyrinthine style made sure of that. But for those Sufis on a quest for deeper meaning, these books became essential sources of inspiration. Among the foundational texts of Sufism—those ancient works that earned their authority by standing the test of time—

you'll find titles like *Kitab al-Ri'ayah* by Harith al-Muhasibi, *Kitab al-Sidq* by Sa'id ibn Isa al-Kharraz, *Kitab al-Luma* by Abu Bakr al-Sarraj, *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki, and *Risalah Qushayriyya* by Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri. But none of these texts has captured the imagination quite like Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din*—a work so influential it's often hailed as the manifesto of a new Islam. The reality is that for a large segment of the Muslim community, their understanding of religion is shaped more by mystical Sufi teachings than by the Quran itself. The writings of Abdul Qadir Jilani and Shahabuddin Suhrawardi have played a crucial role in crafting this new version of Islam. Shah Waliullah's inspired works, like *Hama'at* and *Fuyud al-Haramayn*, are also part of this trend. The Sufi texts that have achieved the status of daily recitation are those collections of *Wazifa* and *Aurad*—invocations and litanies believed to possess extraordinary, almost supernatural powers. Consider the *Musabba'at 'Ashr*—revealed to Ibrahim al-Taymi through mystical unveiling, it blends Quranic verses with additional prayers, giving them an aura of legitimacy and potency that's hard to overlook. These prayers, revered for their supposed effectiveness, have been widely adopted by both the general public and scholars alike.<sup>188</sup> It's said that Ibrahim al-Taymi was taught the *Musabba'at 'Ashr* by Khidr, who had learned it directly from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).<sup>189</sup> Ahmed ibn Idris claimed that every *dhikr* in the Shadhili order was passed down to him by the Prophet and Khidr, who appeared before him in physical form.<sup>190</sup> Then there's Sheikh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili's *Hizb al-Bahr*—a text so extraordinary it's believed to be divinely inspired. Stories of its blessings and power are like folklore in Sufi circles. Shah Waliullah even described it as one of Sheikh al-Shadhili's spiritual miracles,<sup>191</sup> something almost otherworldly in its origin and impact. We've already covered the so-called divine inspiration behind *Fusus al-Hikam* and *Futuh al-Makkiyah*. Ibn Arabi himself claimed these books contain secrets that God revealed to him during deep meditation.<sup>192</sup> He even insisted that he was under direct command from the Divine to complete them.<sup>193</sup>

Among the sacred Sufi texts, Sheikh Suhrawardi's *Awarif al-Ma'arif* holds a special place. It's said that Fariduddin Ganj Shakar personally taught this book to his closest disciples, passing down its wisdom with a sense of sacred duty.<sup>194</sup> Then there's Sheikh Yaqub, who was so deeply immersed in teaching *Fusus al-Hikam* that he was still in the midst of it when he passed away, completely absorbed in its spiritual depths.<sup>195</sup> Alauddin Nili, a devoted disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, valued his master's book *Fawaid al-Fuad* so highly that he painstakingly copied it by hand and rarely strayed from its pages. When asked why he was so engrossed in these teachings, his answer was as intense as his devotion: his salvation, he believed, was bound to every word.<sup>196</sup> The Sufis didn't just let these supposed divinely inspired texts gather dust—they immersed themselves in them, writing detailed commentaries and interpretations. Abdul Quddus Gangohi, for instance, crafted a commentary on *Awarif al-Ma'arif* and annotated *Fusus al-Hikam*.<sup>197</sup> Shah Muhibbullah Ilahabadi, known for his deep mastery of Ibn Arabi's works, reportedly wrote several commentaries on *Fusus*.<sup>198</sup> Despite its mix of controversial ideas and extreme existentialism, Rumi's *Masnavi* was held in high regard among scholars. Some even suggested that calling the *Masnavi* the "Persian Quran" wasn't entirely inappropriate, given its profound influence and significance.<sup>199</sup>

The religious significance of these Sufi texts became so deeply rooted that even the most orthodox scholars treated them as spiritual, almost divine, works. Manazir Ahsan Gilani admitted that, aside from the Quran, he would turn to *Masnavi* and *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* to calm his troubled mind.<sup>200</sup> Ashraf Ali Thanvi went further, advising his disciples to read Hakim Sanai's poetry whenever the challenges of the spiritual path felt overwhelming. Alongside the Quran, he recommended regularly reading *Dalail al-Khayrat* and Attar's *Pandnama*. He even suggested reciting Sanai's supplications during the Tahajjud prayer, believing that doing so would keep the seeker profoundly connected to the spirit of prophethood.<sup>201</sup>

The new revelations didn't just create new forms of worship—they completely redefined the spiritual landscape of Muslim society. Mosques were no longer the only centers of spiritual growth. Instead, *khanqahs*, *zawiyas*, and *takiyas* sprang up everywhere, where Sufi sheikhs—claiming direct lines to God—took charge of the spiritual lives of believers. Sufism had shifted the seeker's goals. The traditional prayers Islam prescribed weren't enough to reach the mystical heights of witnessing the Divine, *fana fi Allah* (annihilation in God), and *baqa bi Allah* (subsistence in God). So, the Sufi masters, guided by their own revelations and mystical insights, invented new and unique prayers—rituals so far removed from the original teachings of Islam that there isn't even a hint of them in the earliest days of the faith.

These prayers were conjured up for all sorts of specific needs. Al-Buni created *Salat al-Arwah*, a ritual designed to let you commune with the souls of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions. The instructions were as mystical as they were precise—after finishing your prayer, you'd close your eyes, face the sky, and move in different directions while chanting certain phrases.<sup>202</sup> Then there was *Salat al-Salawat*, a two-unit prayer said to rescue you from life's toughest moments.<sup>203</sup> For those struggling to stay firm in their faith, *Salat al-Iman* was the go-to,<sup>204</sup> and if you were seeking healing for eye problems, there was a special prayer and set of invocations believed to work wonders.<sup>205</sup>

They didn't stop there. Prayers like *Salat al-Buruj*,<sup>206</sup> *Salat al-Saadat*,<sup>207</sup> *Salat al-Aashiqeen*,<sup>208</sup> and *Salat al-Qurbat*<sup>209</sup> emerged, each with its own specific verses to be recited in a precise order, creating a whole new spiritual universe that felt miles away from the original teachings of Islam. Another of these extraordinary prayers was *Salat Laylat al-Raghaib*,<sup>210</sup> which promised great rewards for those who performed it. Then there were the truly bizarre ones, like a prayer that required you to hang upside down in a well—an extreme act of spiritual discipline known as *Salat Ma'kus* (the inverted prayer).<sup>211</sup> In these practices, Quranic verses were used like mystical formulas, with the belief

that each could unlock different blessings. This approach was deeply influenced by the Hurufi movement. Yet, despite all the strange rituals and mystical confusion, the core belief remained that whatever you sought, you were still asking it from God. In the new religious framework of Sufism, where saints (Awliya) were elevated to positions of cosmic control, it became almost inevitable that formal prayers would be created specifically for asking these saints for help. If mystics like al-Buni could concoct wazifa to unlock the hidden powers of Quranic verses, then naturally, they'd invent rituals to tap into the supposed powers of the saints too. The truth is, some of the prayers crafted by the Sufis were designed to directly seek favors from the dead. And sometimes, the powers of these saints were portrayed as surpassing even those of God. Some revered Sufis would instruct their disciples to pray like this: "O God, by the sanctity of that moment when You made peace with Khawaja Ahmad Nahawandi, grant me my wish."<sup>212</sup> They crafted invocations that were believed to guarantee forgiveness if recited a thousand times during the month of Rajab. According to a Sufi saying, God supposedly declared, "If I do not forgive the one who recites this, then I am not their Lord."<sup>213</sup> Others promoted the practice of Khawaja Uwais al-Qarani's prayer in Rajab, believing it could unlock divine knowledge for the seeker. Uwais al-Qarani, though he never met the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is revered as a spiritual companion. The idea was that praying in his name would open the gates of wisdom.<sup>214</sup> Among orthodox circles, Salat Fatimah was touted for fulfilling personal needs, with the curious instruction to take eleven steps toward the Qibla after completing the prayer.<sup>215</sup> Another prayer in this vein, Salat al-Isra, found its way into the religious practices of everyday Muslims, said to have been passed down from Abdul Qadir Jilani himself. This prayer involved a specific sequence of Quranic verses, and during prostration, worshippers were instructed to say, "Dha'eefe bardaye qawi" (a weak servant before a strong master) and "Niyazmand bar dar-e-bayniaze" (a needy one at the door of the self-sufficient). Afterward, they were told to turn around, walk a hundred

steps toward the Qibla, repeating "Nagardam bara tana kuni hajat rawa" (I won't turn back until You grant my request), and then present their plea to God.<sup>216</sup> In some variations, the instruction was to walk toward Baghdad instead of the Qibla. Prayers like Salat al-Tasbih, Salat al-Hajat, Salat al-Khawf, Salat al-Khidr, Salat al-Awwabin, Salat al-Istikhara, Salat al-Nur, and Salat al-Ghawthiya were all created by Sufis for specific needs, each one a spiritual invention tailored to its purpose.

Apart from crafting their own prayers, the Sufis didn't shy away from borrowing monastic practices from other religious traditions. They introduced new forms of dhikr (remembrance of God), the haunting melodies of sama (spiritual listening), the rhythmic strum of the tanbour,<sup>217</sup> the infatuation with youthful beauty,<sup>218</sup> and gatherings that swirled with wajd (ecstatic states) and hal (spiritual moods). Dance and music became their pathways to spiritual growth. These weren't just innovations—they were borrowed straight from ancient religious cultures, reimagined as ways to reach spiritual heights that the traditional prayers of everyday Muslims couldn't touch. There's even a story of a respected Sufi who, when reminded to perform his obligatory prayers in the middle of a session of dance and music, casually replied that he was already praying<sup>219</sup>—right there in the midst of the rhythm and the rapture.

It wasn't just prayer that got redefined—other core Islamic practices lost their traditional place within Sufi thought. Beyond the Ayyam al-Beedh fasts, which Sufis maintained as a basic practice, they also introduced the concept of forty-day fasts. Sheikh Suhrawardi claimed that anyone who keeps their stomach empty for forty days would be blessed with Ilm al-Ladunni—divine knowledge.<sup>220</sup> The goals of Sufism were so distinct that it's no surprise its followers didn't fully embrace traditional Islamic practices. Instead of the pilgrimage to Mecca, Sufis often promoted circumambulating the graves of revered saints or visiting their shrines, believing these acts to be more spiritually powerful. This belief was rooted in the notion, as Shah Waliullah suggested, that the

souls of these saints gain special powers four to five hundred years after death. Sufi leaders even encouraged their disciples to replace Hajj with these pilgrimages, claiming that circling a saint's grave seven times could achieve the same spiritual fulfillment as Hajj.<sup>221</sup> The Sufis didn't see the need for traditional Islamic rituals because, as Khawaja Moinuddin famously said, "The ordinary pilgrim circumambulates the Kaaba with his body, but the true seeker circumambulates the Throne of God and the Veil of Majesty with his heart."<sup>222</sup> They took it even further, claiming, "There was a time when I circled the Kaaba, but now the Kaaba circles me."<sup>223</sup> With worship redefined in this new spiritual framework, it wasn't just about tweaking or discarding old practices—it was about inventing new prayers, introducing different kinds of fasts, and establishing alternative centers of pilgrimage beyond the Kaaba. They even devised a completely new way of worship, built entirely on the personal inspirations and mystical experiences of the Sufi masters. The Sufi practice of dhikr (remembrance of God) became the living embodiment of this shift.

The method of dhikr detailed in the writings of the great Sufi masters clearly reflects foreign influences in both its form and intent. Even the commonly practiced silent or loud dhikr among Sufis today seems largely borrowed from Aryan traditions. Shah Waliullah's approach to reciting "La ilaha illallah" is a perfect example—there's no trace of it in early Islamic practices. He advised that the seeker should start with "La" (there is no) deep in the throat, bring "ilaha" (god) into the mind, and then forcefully pronounce "illallah" (except Allah) so that it strikes the heart with powerful impact.<sup>224</sup> He went further, suggesting that as the seeker recites "La ilaha illallah," they should not only remove any love for things other than Allah from their heart but also erase the very notion of anything other than Allah from their consciousness. He further explains that when you feel that surge of emotion in your heart, you should shout "La ilaha illallah" with even more force. As the ecstasy builds, make it louder, longer, and really drive home the "illallah" with all the intensity

you can muster.<sup>225</sup> He notes that most Sufi followers are on the same page about shaking the head, pounding the chest, and emphasizing "La ilaha illallah," believing these actions bring a sense of calm to the seeker.<sup>226</sup> Shah Waliullah doesn't mince words when he says that anyone who outright rejects loud dhikr is just being stubborn.<sup>227</sup> This method of loud dhikr, where "La" is forced from deep in the throat, "ilaha" is uttered in the mind, and "illallah" is struck against the heart, isn't just an oddity in traditional Islamic practice—it's almost certainly borrowed from Buddhist monks and Hindu yogic rituals. It's baffling why the Sufis felt compelled to invent new forms of worship when there were already established ways to connect with the divine. If we buy into the Sufi idea that spiritual needs have evolved from the Prophet's time to the era of Sheikh al-Akbar (Ibn Arabi), then maybe the old forms of worship wouldn't cut it. But these new, tailored forms of worship signal the arrival of something entirely new—almost a new religion. Sadly, many scholars, blinded by their unwavering devotion to Sufis, refuse to confront this uncomfortable reality.

The Sufis argue that these newly invented methods of dhikr can elevate a seeker's soul to the highest spiritual realms.<sup>228</sup> But the techniques they suggest—if not directly lifted from yoga—seem like a parody of traditional Islamic prayer. Shah Waliullah describes it like this: for loud dhikr, sit cross-legged and grip the "Kimas" nerve with your right thumb and the adjacent finger. Then, facing the Qibla with full concentration, start reciting "La ilaha illallah" with intensity. The "La" should be pulled up from the navel to the right shoulder, and "ilaha" should be expelled from the mind, as if you're purging your heart of anything but Allah. With the next breath, "illallah" should be driven forcefully into your heart.<sup>229</sup> As you recite, contemplate the layers of meaning: first, "There is no beloved but Allah"; then, "There is no goal but Allah"; and finally, at the peak of your spiritual journey, "There is no existence but Allah." Because these methods of worship were Sufi inventions or the result of personal inspiration, there was never a single,



uniform way to perform them, even among Sufis themselves. The Qadiriyya order had one approach to loud dhikr, while the Naqshbandis did it differently. Some followers would even adjust the methods and words of dhikr to fit their own needs. It became widely accepted that the spiritual teachings of Sufi masters were as authoritative as the Quran and Sunnah, leaving seekers with little choice but to fully embrace the dhikr and practices prescribed by their Sheikh with complete faith. There was a widespread belief that a single dhikr or wazifa couldn't possibly work for everyone. This made a disciple's entire spiritual practice—every method of worship and element of their religious life—completely dependent on the whims and directions of their Sufi Sheikh. Whenever someone introduced a new way of worship, it was almost seen as a religious duty to accept it as a fresh revelation or newfound wisdom. Different forms of dhikr emerged—one-strike, two-strike, three-strike methods. For some, repeating "Allah Allah" was enough; for others, just the sound of "Hu" would do. Some rituals were devised and given grand names like Sultan al-Adhkar (the King of Remembrances). The instructions were almost surreal: the seeker was told to sit with their knees drawn up, take slow, deep breaths, and hold their breath. Then, they were to cover their ears, eyes, and nostrils with both hands, sealing off all their senses. With their tongue pressed against the roof of their mouth, they silently repeated "Allah" in their mind until they felt their breath slipping away. At that point, they would uncover their nostrils, take three quick breaths, and then start the process over again. The promise was that with persistence, this practice would guarantee kashf—a mystical unveiling.<sup>230</sup>

Orthodox scholars consistently objected to these fabricated rituals and Sufi adhkar, arguing that there's no evidence for these foreign practices from the time of the Prophet, and that such self-invented acts of worship have no basis in Islam. But for those consumed by the desire to experience the Divine, desperate to see God with the eyes of their heart, and who, in their self-induced trances, felt their very being dissolve, the sky shatter,

and the fabric of reality disintegrate—reasoning with them using Quran and Sunnah was futile. These individuals, lost in their delusions or psychological disturbances, believed that in this state of annihilation, they were witnessing the very light of God.<sup>231</sup> How could you ever convince such psychologically unhinged souls with arguments from the Quran and Sunnah? In a world where someone claims to be *fana fi Allah*—annihilated in God—and then roams around asking, "Who is Abu Yazid? Where is Abu Yazid?" even though it's Abu Yazid himself doing the asking, reason just doesn't stand a chance.<sup>232</sup> Especially when orthodox scholars are telling believers that if you close your eyes in solitude, focus your heart on the spiritual realm, and keep chanting "Allah Allah" until you lose awareness of yourself, some divine door will open for you.<sup>233</sup> In such an environment, there's hardly any space for someone to snap out of their psychological delusions and pseudo-spiritual intoxication to actually consider the objections of critics. On the flip side, this spiritual intoxication and the psychological illusions of revelations and mystical insights can lead even well-meaning people into a dangerous pride, where they start valuing their own "discoveries" over divine revelation itself. There's a story about someone who criticized the two-strike dhikr "Allah Allah," saying it had no basis in Islamic law and, according to some grammarians like Razi, wasn't even grammatically correct. But Sheikh Zakariya didn't just defend the practice; he doubled down, claiming that this dhikr was "even more in line with the words of the Quran."<sup>234</sup>

## Conclusion

A student of history and the Quran would be completely baffled by how a community with a clear understanding of divine revelation, one that recognizes Muhammad (PBUH) as the final prophet and has always taken a firm stand against false prophets, could reach a point where they're suddenly willing to embrace the mystical visions and revelations of various spiritual figures. How did it happen that, even with the Quran in their midst, this same community allowed a new religion to take root alongside the true faith? Until we properly confront this question, we'll never understand the phenomenon of intellectual decline, nor will we grasp the bitter truth that spiritual figures have cast such a dense and all-encompassing veil over divine revelation that we've become completely detached from it, lost instead in a haze of mystical visions and revelations. The real tragedy is that we've come to mistake this new religion of the spiritual elite for true Islam.

The credit for this new edition of Islam largely goes to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, revered among scholars as *Hujjat al-Islam* (the Proof of Islam).<sup>235</sup> Ghazali's personal crises, his intellectual struggles, and his sincere quest for truth ultimately failed to rise above the specific issues of his time. Instead of cutting through the fog that had settled over divine revelation, his search for truth became a blend of various intellectual approaches. He became the champion of a version of Islam that can best be described as the reconciliatory intellectual formula of his era. To grasp this phenomenon, we need to go further back, to the intellectual environment of the Shafi'i era, where the seeds of this confusion were first sown. Back then, no one imagined that the early attempts to interpret divine revelation accurately and place it within its historical context would eventually obscure the revelation itself, turning it into something

subordinate to history. Starting in the early second century, there was this ongoing debate about the role of traditions and narratives in understanding divine revelation. It eventually crystallized under Imam Shafi'i, who gave it an interpretative framework that stuck. By Shafi'i's time, thanks to his compelling writing and theological arguments, these traditions and narratives had taken on a life of their own, gaining the status of divinely-inspired sources alongside the revelation itself. Once this trend of giving heavenly weight to secondary sources caught on, it spawned various schools of thought, each based on different sets of traditions and narratives.

As we know, the development of Fiqh—Islamic jurisprudence—was shaped by theological debates almost from the start. These theological ideas seeped into every corner of Muslim thought, leaving nothing untouched. Even the gatherings of well-meaning believers became dominated by these methods. The impact was profound: the concept of supplementary revelation gained ground, standing side by side with divine revelation. Over time, Fiqh got tangled in the opinions of scholars rather than staying rooted in historical traditions. To push back against this trend, a group of Hadith scholars tried to elevate traditions above personal interpretations when it came to supplementary revelation. But their efforts backfired in a way: instead of purging the idea, they cemented it. The notion of supplementary revelation became a permanent fixture in our collective thinking, sitting uncomfortably next to the primary revelation. This sparked the idea that if the sayings of the Prophet and the practices of his companions could be held as authoritative as the Quran and used to shape religious life through Fiqh, then why should the dreams, revelations, and mystical experiences of devout believers be dismissed? Especially when these believers claim that the Prophet Muhammad himself appeared to them in dreams, offering specific instructions. Sufis seized on this reasoning to present themselves as even more credible spokespeople for Islam than the scholars of Fiqh. The Sufis insisted that if Hadith scholars were deemed learned simply for

memorizing narrations, and jurists were respected for extracting rulings from those narrations, then they themselves deserved even greater recognition as the true interpreters of the faith. After all, they weren't just focused on outward rituals—they were deeply committed to purifying and refining the heart, always seeking a deeper spiritual meaning in religion. In their view, the correct interpretation of the faith required pure, pious hearts, making them the most qualified to shoulder this delicate responsibility.<sup>236</sup>

The claims of the Sufis, insisting that they were the true experts in the purification of hearts and inner spirituality, began to gain serious traction at a time when philosophical debates had sent the scholars of Fiqh and their methods into an intellectual tailspin. Muslim society was caught in a relentless storm of disagreements over legal interpretations. Believers were splintered into factions, scholars were locked in heated debates, hurling insults at one another, followers clashed, and all the while, these scholars were scrambling for worldly power and prestigious positions. It was a scene that cast a long shadow of doubt over the credibility of the scholars and jurists. In Ghazali's time, the scholars' lust for worldly status had reached absurd heights—one scholar dubbed himself "ملك النحاة" (King of Grammarians),<sup>237</sup> while another had a herald announce before his procession, "هَذَا الْمَلِكُ الْعُلَمَاءُ" (Here comes the king of scholars).<sup>238</sup> Ghazali saw these men not as heirs to prophetic wisdom but as mere formalists who had been overtaken by their own egos, using knowledge to line their pockets.<sup>239</sup> This moral decay among the outwardly pious created the perfect opening for those who claimed to renounce the world. In a society increasingly drowning in materialism, it's no wonder that the champions of asceticism and spirituality began to exude a certain romantic allure.

From the early centuries of Islam, there's no denying that a group of devout believers was in search of deeper spiritual meaning. But in those early days, their ideas were neither clearly defined nor given much social or religious weight.<sup>240</sup> Figures like Harith al-Muhasibi, Junayd al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr al-Shibli, and other mystics, even at the height of

their influence, were seen as little more than a fringe movement.<sup>241</sup> Al-Muhasibi's writings, which offered a fresh, almost shocking take on spiritual matters, resonated with only a small audience. Similarly, like many other Sufi texts, Abu Talib al-Makki's *Quwat al-Qulub* failed to capture much public interest. But when a book with similar content transformed into *Ihya Ulum al-Din* and found a champion in Ghazali, the Hujjat al-Islam, what had once been on the fringes of Muslim society suddenly moved to the center. Ghazali's intellectual journey, as recounted in *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, became more than just the story of one man's search for truth—it turned into the collective narrative of the entire community. Over time, this newly embraced version of Islam, with Ghazali at its forefront, asserted itself so powerfully that other interpretations of the faith were pushed aside, fading into the background.

Ghazali began his journey among the ulama al-zahir—the scholars of Fiqh—rising to prominence through his association with the Nizamiyya of Baghdad. But over time, he came to a stark realization: without profound moral reform, no significant change could occur within the community. He saw more clearly than most the decline of outward Fiqh and the flaws in its methodology. Confronted with this, he believed that the only way to free Muslim thought from the grip of rigid, stagnant, and power-seeking scholars was to first address the moral decay in society. And in his view, this task could only be accomplished by the ulama al-batin—the champions of inner knowledge. Ghazali missed the bigger picture. The intellectual crisis and moral decay of the Muslim community weren't just random failings—they pointed to a much deeper issue rooted in the very sources and foundations of Muslim thought. The stagnation of the ulama al-zahir, their obsession with the opinions of past scholars, and the elevation of ancient jurists to near-saintly status—all of this happened only after scholars lost their direct connection to divine revelation. But instead of tackling this fundamental problem, Ghazali thought the monastic piety of the devout could somehow stem the moral

decline. It was a temporary, desperate move, and hoping it would spark any real intellectual or spiritual revival was pure wishful thinking. In the end, despite all its efforts, *Ihya Ulum al-Din* became more of a manifesto for a new form of religion rather than a true revival of the faith.

Ghazali managed to push back against philosophy, but he made a grave mistake in underestimating the danger posed by those who, under the guise of spirituality, were promoting a new religion based on their personal mystical experiences. By legitimizing *ilm al-mukashafa*—the so-called knowledge of mystical unveiling—as a valid, even superior, branch of knowledge, Ghazali opened the door for the mental disturbances, psychological delusions, and hallucinations of ordinary people to be given the status of sacred texts, passed off as revelations and mystical insights. In the Shafi'i era, the concept of supplementary revelation took hold, splintering Fiqh into various, often conflicting, schools of thought. But things took an even darker turn when mystical experiences (*mukashafa*) were given credibility. At least with traditions and narrations, there was room for debate, some way to evaluate them based on history and the reliability of sources. But once mystical experiences were stamped with legitimacy, there was no way to challenge these new supplementary sources. Those who had grown weary of the rigid structure of Fiqh and turned to the devout for fresh revelations found themselves trapped by the opinions and sayings captured in mystical texts. The triumph of love over reason was celebrated, but it fundamentally altered the course of Muslim thought. The Quranic call {فاتقوا يا أولي الألباب} (So fear [Allah], O you of understanding) was drowned out by the mystics' fervent cries, so much so that even a thinker like Iqbal ended up praying, مرے مولا مجھے صاحب جنوں کر "O Lord, make me mad with love." The victory of passion over reason signaled a seismic shift in Muslim thought, steering the collective mind away from mastering the world and towards renouncing it. A community once destined for leadership found itself in a self-imposed exile from the exalted ideals of prophethood.

Ghazali's new version of Islam didn't win over the masses right away. In fact, it faced strong backlash from both scholars and ordinary Muslims. This reimagined faith, where personal mystical experiences were given the weight of sacred texts, was met with harsh criticism. His books were burned in various regions, and there were bans on their promotion and distribution.<sup>242</sup> But in a time of intellectual crisis, when Muslim thought was desperately seeking a real revival, Ghazali's vision gradually gained traction—mostly because there wasn't any alternative on the horizon. Ghazali, who set out to rescue the Islamic world from an intellectual crisis and bravely took on philosophy, had sparked hope that Muslim thought might finally return to its original sources. But instead of freeing the Muslim mind from the constraints of the jurists, he ended up entrusting it to the intellectual illusions of the devout mystics. Ever since, every attempt to move beyond *Ihya Ulum al-Din* feels like nothing more than an extension of it.

The real challenge now isn't just peeling back the historical layers that have clouded divine revelation—it's also exposing the true nature of the spiritualists' so-called revelations and mystical experiences. Without tackling this head-on, there's no way Muslim thought can break free from the thousand-year crisis it's been trapped in. If we don't confront this fundamental issue, every attempt at revival will just reduce the faith to a set of moral codes—the same lifeless mindset that has kept the Muslim community in decline for centuries.

The End



## Notes & References

<sup>1</sup>Mujaddid Alf Thani called the *mutashabihat*—the allegorical verses—the very essence of the Quran. Just take a look at what he had to say:

The terms hand, face, foot, leg, fingers, and toes you find in the Quran and Hadith are all part of the *mutashabihat*—the allegorical verses. And those disjointed letters at the beginning of some Quranic chapters? They're also part of the *mutashabihat*—known only to the 'ulama' al-rasikhun, the firmly grounded scholars. Don't be fooled into thinking ta'wil (interpretation) is just about power, as some might interpret hand to mean, or essence, as others might say about face. No, these are deep, intricate secrets, known only to a chosen few.

As for those disjointed letters in the Quran, each letter is like an ocean, filled with hidden secrets of the lover and the beloved—a profound symbol of the delicate mysteries between them. Sure, the *muhkamat*—the clear verses—are the foundation of the book, but the real essence, the true objectives, are nestled in the *mutashabihat*. The *muhkamat* are just the means, not the ends. The core of the Quran lies in these *mutashabihat*, while the *muhkamat* are merely the outer shell. The essence is hidden in the *mutashabihat*, revealing the truth through symbols and hints, while the *muhkamat* are just forms that represent those truths. A truly grounded scholar is someone who can merge essence with form, bringing reality into expression. Meanwhile, those who focus only on the outer layer are content with the *muhkamat* and don't look any deeper.

”ید و وجه و قدم و ساق و اصابع و انامل که در قرآن و حدیث آمده است، همه از متشابهات است و بمچنین حروف مقطعات که در اوائل قرآن وارد شده اند نیز از متشابهات اند که بر تاویل آنها اطلاع نداده مگر علماء راسخین را. خیال نه کند که تاویل، عبارت از قدرت است که ید تعبیر آن نموده اند و یا ذات است که بوجه آن را معبر ساخته. بلکه آنها از اسرار غامضه است که باخص خواص آنرا نموده اند. از حروف مقطعات قرآنی چه نویسد که بر حرف بحرست موج از اسرار خفیه عاشق و معشوق و رمزست غامض از رموز دقیقه محب و محبوب. و محکّمات بر چند امّیات کتاب اند، اما نتائج و ثمرات آن که متشابهات اند از مقاصد کتاب اند. امّیات از وسائل بیش نیستند از برای حصول نتائج. پس لب کتاب متشابهات اند و محکّمات کتاب قشّر آن. لب، متشابهات اند که بر رمز و اشاره بیان اصل می نمایند و از حقیقت معامله آن مرتبه نشان می دهند بخلاف محکّمات. متشابهات حقائق اند و محکّمات نسبت بمتشابهات صور آن حقائق. عالم راسخ کییر بود که لب را

بقشر تواند جمع ساخت و حقیقت را بصورت تواند فرود آورد. علمائ قشر به قشر خرسند اند و بمحکّمات اکتفا نموده." (مکتوب ۲۷۶ ج ۱ ص ۳۵۷ مطبوعه نول کشور)

<sup>2</sup> Take a look at these verses by Rumi:

مادل اندر راهِ جان انداختیم  
 غلغله اندر جهان انداختیم  
 ما ز قرآن برگزیده مغز را  
 پوست را پیش سگان انداختیم  
 جبّه و دستار و علم و قیل و قال  
 جمله در آبِ روان انداختیم  
 از کمان شوق تیر معرفت  
 راست کرده بر نشان انداختیم

We cast our hearts on the path of the soul,  
 And stirred up echoes across the world whole.  
 We chose the essence from the Quran's grace,  
 And tossed the husk to the dogs to chase.  
 The cloak, the turban, the knowledge, the talk,  
 All we threw into the river's walk.  
 From the bow of longing, with knowledge's dart,  
 We shot straight to the target's heart.

<sup>3</sup> This idea eventually sparked the Batini movement, out of which the ideological Islam of the Fatimids in Egypt emerged—a movement that history would come to know as the Ismaili sect.

<sup>4</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Futoohat Makkiyah* (Urdu Translation), Rawalpindi (Punjab), Volume 1, Part 2, Chapter 25, Page 639.

When it came to understanding the Quran, people started reading it as if it held the secrets of "ما کان وما یكون"—what was and what will be. This idea echoed the same misconception that had misled Jewish scholars about the Torah. The phrase "تبیاننا لکل شیء"—meant to convey that the Quran is complete guidance and needs no additional source—was twisted by some scholars into the notion that the book contained the knowledge of "ما کان وما یكون", everything that has happened and everything that will happen. These misconceptions warped the general understanding of divine revelation.

Suddenly, each verse of the Quran wasn't just what it appeared to be; it was believed to have countless hidden layers of meaning, so intricate that even the most learned minds couldn't easily unravel them. As Mulla Ali Qari quoted in his book *Mirqat*, some scholars claimed that every verse in the Quran has sixty thousand meanings. There's a story attributed to Ali that if he wanted, he could fill seventy camels with commentary on the Quran. In some versions, it's said he could do the same with just the commentary on Surah Al-Fatiha alone. Allama Ahmad Raza Khan, quoting some revered figures, mentioned that if they were to explain just the verse "مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ"—the one about abrogation—it would take a hundred thousand camels to carry all the commentary, and even then, it wouldn't be complete. He also noted that some saints claimed every letter of the Quran holds forty million meanings. There's a tale of a certain Sardar Ali Khawas, who supposedly had such a deep understanding of Surah Al-Fatiha that it unlocked forty thousand nine hundred ninety different branches of knowledge for him. Imam Sha'rani's *Mizan al-Shari'a al-Kubra* mentions his brother, Afzal al-Din, who derived two hundred forty-seven thousand nine hundred ninety-nine sciences from Surah Al-Fatiha. And then, as if that weren't enough, he connected them all to the phrase "Bismillah", further distilled them to the letter "B" in "Bismillah", and finally down to the dot below the "B". Afzal al-Din even claimed that if he wanted, he could fill eighty camels with knowledge derived from just that single dot.

Those who tried to turn the Quran into a book of "ما كان وما يكون"—what was and what will be—ended up twisting it from a guide for life into a manual for fortune-telling. According to scholars like Suyuti and Juwayni, there's talk of some who could predict the year of Jerusalem's conquest way ahead of time, just by reading the verse "الْم غلبت الروم" (Alif Lam Mim. The Romans have been defeated). Whether or not these claims hold up to historical scrutiny is another matter, but the sheer weight of such beliefs has convinced some within the Muslim community that the Quran is a tool for forecasting the future.

Reference: Ahmad Raza Khan, *Al-Dawlat al-Makkiyah bil Madat al-Ghaybiyah*, Karachi, 1955, pp. 279-285.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, published in Egypt, 1352 AH, Volume 1, Page 88.

<sup>6</sup> Bukhari, Chapter on Knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> Khidr, the figure traditionally revered in Muslim thought as Hazrat Khidr (peace be upon him), is actually more of a fictional character. You won't find his name in the Quran, and outside of a few unreliable narrators in exegesis, he's virtually unknown. The whole idea of Khidr has been spun around the phrase {عبدا من عبادنا} ("a servant among Our servants"). In the Quranic story, Musa's companion is a secondary figure at best. But mystics and imaginative commentators have built up Khidr into this spiritual icon—a guide for mystics through the ages. He's become this living, miraculous spiritual leader, often considered to be above even prophets when it comes to divine mysteries. Shah Waliullah, in his book *Anfas al-Arifin*, argues for Khidr's existence and his occasional appearances. In *Futuh al-Makkiyah*, Ibn Arabi doesn't just mention Khidr—he brings him to life with vivid, almost cinematic detail. Picture this: the port of Tunis, bathed in the light of a full moon, and there's Khidr, walking on water as if defying the laws of nature, his feet untouched by the waves. In just a few steps, he covers two miles and then ascends to a high minaret to praise Allah. In another surreal encounter, Ibn Arabi watches as Khidr prays, suspended mid-air. But perhaps most striking is Ibn Arabi's claim that Khidr himself bestowed upon him the *khirqah*—a Sufi robe symbolizing the transfer of the Sheikh's spiritual state to the disciple. If Sufis believe they possess knowledge even greater than that of the prophets, it fits right into this narrative where Khidr is portrayed as holding a certain mystical superiority over Musa (Moses).

The concept of Khidr feels like it was borrowed from Jewish and Christian sources. Ibn Taymiyyah even traced the name back to a well-known Jewish temple called the Church of Khidr. This theory gains traction when you realize that the first mention of Khidr in Muslim thought comes from Wahb ibn Munabbih. Ibn Hajar, citing Wahb's book *Al-Mubtada*, mentions that even in Wahb's time, people claimed to have seen Khidr. It's almost as if the idea of Khidr was quietly woven into the fabric of Islamic thought, borrowing threads from other traditions. (*Al-Isabah*, Volume 1, Page 117).

Commentators of the Quran, who often enjoy weaving together anecdotes and stories from various traditions, have spun all kinds of theories around the mythical figure of Khidr. Maqatil even attempted to present him as a prophet. One narration attributed to the Prophet Muhammad claims that Khidr got his name because when he sat in the desert, the ground beneath him would come to life with greenery. Mujahid offered another explanation—he suggested that Khidr was named so because wherever he prayed, green grass would spring up around him. And then there’s the idea that he was always dressed in green, a color rich with symbolism in Sufism, which could be the origin of his name. Some Sufis have tried to portray Khidr as the spiritual guide of someone who, despite being on a high spiritual plane, struggles with pride—often illustrating this dynamic with Musa (Moses). But even with all the interpretive narrations, they can’t seem to pin down who Khidr really is. As a result, the popular stories about Khidr are just as believable and widely accepted. One tale says he was the son of Adam; another claims he was Pharaoh’s grandson. The debates continue—was the righteous man, عبدا من عبادنا, in the story of Musa actually Khidr, or was Khidr some prophet or saint from a time long gone? The lines are blurred, and the legends only keep growing.

Traditional scholars insist that Khidr, whatever he may have been, is no longer among us—just as Imam Bukhari believed. But in the world of Sufis, tales of encounters with Khidr are woven through the writings of various eras. Ibn Taymiyyah called him a jinn, while Ibn Qayyim believed him to be an angel ملك من الملائكة who took on human form. Though reports of such meetings might be rarer today, Imam Nawawi noted that in his time, many believed Khidr was still alive, walking among us. Despite being a mythical figure, Khidr has come to represent, in traditional Muslim thought, the last possible link to divine guidance. Whether seen as a prophet or a saint, Khidr’s supposed knowledge of divine secrets and his perceived superiority over Musa (Moses) have continually nudged at the edges of the belief in the finality of prophethood in the Sufi mindset.

<sup>8</sup> Take Mujaddid Alf Thani, for instance. In one of his dream-like accounts, he describes seeing Hazrat Ali, who told him, "I've come to teach you the knowledge of the heavens."

(*Maktubat Imam Rabbani*, Volume 1, Part 1, Hyderabad, p. 99).

<sup>9</sup> *Kitab al-Luma*, p. 24

<sup>10</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, translated by Abdul Qadeer Siddiqui, Hyderabad 1942, p. 69

<sup>11</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Tafsir Shaykh al-Akbar*, published in Egypt, 1317 AH, under the mentioned verse, pp. 4-5

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., p.38

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p.48

<sup>14</sup> Like so many other Sufi hadiths, this one doesn't hold up under scrutiny from the hadith scholars. Asqalani points out that Imam Nasa'i didn't even consider it a hadith at all—it's just something Ibrahim bin A'ilah supposedly said. You won't find this hadith in any of the major collections, which speaks volumes about its credibility, or lack thereof.

This fabricated hadith played a pivotal role in shaping the Sufi version of Islam, leading to some of the most extreme examples of thought and practice. Abu Bakr is said to have confessed that he spent twelve years wrestling with his ego, five more years polishing the mirror of his heart, and another year contemplating the relationship between the two. Even then, he found that a thread of ego, symbolized by a "zunnar," still clung to him. It took him another twelve years to cut it, but even after that, he discovered the "zunnar" was still lodged deep within his inner self. He spent another five years searching for a way to remove it, and finally, he claimed that when he looked at people, he saw them as dead, so he performed the funeral prayer with four takbirs over them.

This internal battle and relentless struggle led the Sufis down a path that veered closer to the practices of Christian monks, Hindu sadhus, and Buddhist monks than to anything within Islam. The foundations of this journey were more steeped in traditions and literature far removed from Islamic teachings, making it, in every sense, an alien concept within the faith.

<sup>15</sup> Tafsir al-Shaykh al-Akbar by Ibn Arabi, referenced on page 191.

<sup>16</sup> Imam Ghazali leaned on the hadith, "إن من العلم كهيئة المكنون لا يعلمه إلا أهل المعرفة" (Ihya Ulum al-Din, Vol. 1, p. 19), to back up the idea of ilm ladunni—innate, hidden knowledge. Scholars and Sufis have often drawn parallels between the Quran's clear verses (محكمات) and its more ambiguous ones (متشابهات), likening them to outward and inward knowledge. But the truth is, محكمات are simply concepts that have been clarified for human intellect through analogy. As our understanding of the world deepens, the meanings of these verses naturally unfold.

The notion that this deeper knowledge is reserved for a select few who can grasp it through inner light completely misses the Quran's essence. The Quran constantly emphasizes its clarity, describing itself as "كتاب مبين" and "هدى للمتقين"—a clear book in Arabic, a guide for the righteous and for all of humanity, plain and evident. There's no need for hidden wisdom or esoteric interpretation to understand its message.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Tusi, *Kitab al-Luma fi't-Tasawwuf*, translated by Dr. Pir Muhammad Hasan, Islamabad 1986, pp. 4-5

<sup>18</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, *Qut al-Qulub*, Egypt 1391 AH, Vol. 1, p. 198

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 32

<sup>20</sup> Shah Waliullah delves into this idea in *Tafhimat Ilahiyya*—you can find it in *Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyya*, Medina Press Bijnor, 1936, Vol. 2, p. 28. He doesn't stop there, though. In *Fuyud al-Haramayn*, he takes it further, saying, "There are two paths to reaching God: one through the Prophet, which reaches the people... and the other, a direct line between Allah and His servant, with no intermediary in between." (*Fuyud al-Haramayn*, Delhi 1305 AH, p. 50). It's this second path, free from any go-betweens, that suggests a more intimate, unmediated connection with the divine—a concept that pushes the boundaries of traditional religious thought.

<sup>21</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Egypt 1329 AH, Vol. 2, p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Arabi might downplay his divine inspiration, insisting it's a step below prophecy—after all, he says, saints receive inspiration with the heart as an intermediary, while prophets get their messages straight from God. But don't

be fooled. He leaves no room for doubt in his belief that it's all the same essence, the same divine light, that flows from Adam to Muhammad and through every saint in between.

(*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Egypt 1329 AH, Vol. 1, p. 57)

<sup>23</sup> Ghazali, *Kimiya al-Saadat*, p. 13, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, published in Egypt, 1289 AH, Vol. 3, p. 16

<sup>24</sup> *Qut al-Qulub*, p. 134

<sup>25</sup> In the 13th-century classic Zuhar, the essence of human existence is boiled down to one thing: fana fi al-haq, or annihilation in the Truth. The idea is simple yet profound—all souls spring from the Divine Essence, which stands as both the beginning and the end. It's the origin and the destination, all wrapped into one.

The journey toward mushahada al-haq, the realization of Truth that ends in fana fi al-haq—annihilation in the Divine—demands a profound understanding of the Torah's inner layers. The Torah, viewed as a feminine embodiment of God, isn't something you can just skim through. Jewish mystics insisted on peeling back its layers, interpreting it on four distinct levels to truly make it a guide for life.

First, there's the literal reading (peshat). But that's just the beginning. The second level is where you take those words and make them a blueprint for living, transforming the text into a manifesto (remez). Then comes derash, the third stage, where you go beyond study into a realm of passionate devotion. Here, the seeker is no longer just reading—they are consumed by the pursuit of God, making it their life's ultimate aim. And finally, the fourth level is where you dive into the deepest secrets of the Torah, detaching from the world entirely, with the Divine Essence as the sole focus of meditation. For those who delve into the mystical meanings of the Torah, it's not just a book of guidance—it's a roadmap to the Garden of Truth, accessible only through intense spiritual discipline. But somewhere along the way, for Jewish mystics, following the Torah morphed into a kind of technical exercise, losing its real-world relevance. Rather than embracing the Torah as a practical guide for life, they began to treat it as a book of hidden knowledge, sparking the



creation of countless meditative practices centered on letters and recitations, and giving rise to dedicated schools of this esoteric art.

Take, for example, *The Book of Directions to the Duties of the Heart* by Bachya ben Joseph Ibn Pakuda, a work from the 11th century. Here, the author lays out ten stages of the spiritual journey, each one meticulously detailed in its own chapter, like some kind of mystical instruction manual. In the 16th century, under the enigmatic guidance of Isaac Luria, a whole array of dhikr practices and methods for gazing into the divine emerged. The invention of new forms of worship—a hallmark of mystics across religions—feeds off the idea that through these inner experiences, a seeker can do more than just connect with God; they can reach a place where their very existence dissolves into the Divine Essence itself.

<sup>26</sup> Sheikh Abu al-Abbas Ahmed bin Ali al-Buni's *Shams al-Ma'arif al-Kubra*, translated into Urdu by Iqbaluddin Ahmed and published by Delhi's Farid Book Depot, is cited on page 46. For simplicity, this book will be referred to as al-Buni throughout.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 42

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 78

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 81

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 81—refer to the 'Meem' symbol



<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 91

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 76

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 133—refer to the 'Ha' (ה) letter in Wifq

[illegible]

<sup>35</sup> For details on the سواقط سورة فاتحه (omitted letters of Surah Al-Fatiha), see Al-Buni, pp. 144-149.

<sup>36</sup> See *Daira-e-Ma'arif* (Urdu), published in Lahore, under the entry for "Jafr", p. 312.

<sup>37</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Primordial Dot: Some Thoughts about Sufi Letter Mysticism* in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 356.

<sup>38</sup> For more details, see footnote number 25 in this chapter, as well as Moses de Leon's famous work *Zohar*, which traces its roots to the 2nd-century revered Jewish mystic Rabbi Shimon.

<sup>39</sup> Many Sufis have long believed in the power of connecting the final "Meem" of "Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim" with the "Alif" of "Alhamdulillah" during recitation—a practice hailed as both effective and spiritually potent. Even in later generations, scholars like Shah Waliullah and Ashraf Ali Thanvi championed this unique method of reciting. Mir Waliuddin, drawing from *Fatawa al-Sufiya*, echoes this sentiment, insisting on its proven benefits. For a deeper dive, you can check out Mir Waliuddin's *Bimari aur Uska Ruhani Ilaj* (Illness and Its Spiritual Treatment), published by Nadwat-ul-Musannifeen in Delhi, 1972, page 146.

<sup>40</sup> According to the esoteric science of numerology, Surah Maryam carries the staggering value of 299,644. Imagine that—the verses of the Quran laid out in a chart, a cosmic blueprint composed of numbers that look something like this:

|           |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 9 2 5 7 9 | 9 2 9 7 7 | 9 2 5 5 1 |
| 9 2 5 5 7 | 9 2 5 7 8 | 9 2 5 7 9 |
| 9 2 5 7 5 | 9 2 5 5 2 | 9 2 5 7 2 |

It's a mystical, almost otherworldly arrangement of digits, detailed in the introduction to Translation of the Quran by Ashraf Ali Thanvi, published by Taj Company, Lahore, on page 28.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Buni, p. 125

<sup>42</sup> Also see p. 40 for the following chart:

|    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|
| ٣  | ١٣ | ١٥ | ١  |
| ٩  | ٤  | ٦  | ١٢ |
| ٥  | ١١ | ١٠ | ٨  |
| ١٦ | ٢  | ٣  | ٢  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| ا | ب | د |
| ب | د | د |
| ج | ط | ع |
| ح | ب | و |

<sup>43</sup> Al-Buni, p. 87

<sup>44</sup> op. cit., p. 69

<sup>45</sup> op. cit., p. 82

<sup>46</sup> In *Shams al-Ma'arif*, the author references al-Muhasibi, who recounts that Angel Gabriel once brought the Ism al-Azam (the Greatest Name of Allah) to the Prophet Muhammad. This divine name was written on a leaf from Paradise, sealed with musk. Al-Muhasibi shares the prayer, which goes: "اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِاسْمِكَ الْمَخْزُونِ الْمُكْنُونِ الطَّابِرِ الْمُطَهَّرِ الْفَدُوسِ الْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ" (O Allah, I ask You by Your hidden, sacred, pure, and purifying Name, the Holy, the Living, the Eternal, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Majestic, and the Noble).

According to a narration attributed to Anas, a woman once asked the Prophet if she could learn this prayer. However, the Prophet declined, saying, "We do not teach this prayer to women and children." It's said that a scholar once approached an Imam, asking for a prayer that could serve as a lifeline in the darkest of times. Passed down through the words of esteemed sages, the prayer is believed to harbor the Ism al-Azam—the Greatest Name of Allah. The prayer goes like this:

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِاسْمِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ اللَّهُ الْمُقَدَّسُ فِي حَقَائِقِ مَحْضِ التَّخْصُّصِ وَبِأَنَّكَ أَنْتَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ خَالٍ مِنْ أَحْوَالِ الْجَدِّ وَالتَّعْدِيلِ وَبِأَنَّكَ أَنْتَ اللَّهُ الْمُقَدَّسُ بِخَصَائِصِ الْأَخْدِيَّةِ وَالصَّمْدِيَّةِ وَالنَّدِّ وَالنَّقِيضِ وَالنَّظِيرِ وَبِأَنَّكَ أَنْتَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَبِوَسْمِيعِ الْبَصِيرِ أَنْ تُصَلِّيَ عَلَيَّ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَأَنْ تَقْضِيَ حَوَائِجِي كُلَّهَا قَضَائٍ يَكُونُ فِيهِ خَيْرُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ مَحْفُوظًا بِالرَّعَايَةِ مِنَ الْآفَاتِ مَلْحُوظًا بِخَصَائِصِ الْعِنَايَاتِ يَا عَوَاذُ يَا الْخَيْرَاتِ يَا مَنْ بُوِ أَبْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَبْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ وَأَبْلُ الْحَسَنَاتِ- اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ خَادِمَ تَعَزُّ رَبُّوَيْكَ بِإِظْهَارِ مَسْئَلَةِ

إِنَّكَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ وَ شَاطِدُ حَقَائِقِ الْمَطَالِبِ قَبْلَ مُبَاشَرَتِهَا لِلْقُلُوبِ فَتَمِثُّهَا لِجَمِيلِ الْخَاتِمِ يَا خَيْرَ الْمُطْلُوبِ وَ صَلَّى  
اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ خَيْرُ الْخَلْقِ

(O Allah, I ask You by Your Name that You are Allah, the Sacred in the pure realities of distinction, and that You are Allah in all conditions of seriousness and adjustment, and that You are Allah, the Sacred with the characteristics of Oneness and Eternality, free from any equal, opposite, or similar; and that You are Allah, there is nothing like unto You, and You are the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. O Allah, bestow Your blessings on our master Muhammad and fulfill all my needs in a way that brings the good of this world and the Hereafter, protected by Your care from calamities and observed with the special care of Your mercies. O You who returns with goodness, O You who is deserving of piety and forgiveness and good deeds. O Allah, this is the request of a servant who honors Your lordship by presenting his plea, as You are the Knower of the unseen and witness to the realities of needs before they are brought to the hearts. So, complete it with a beautiful ending, O Best of those who are sought, and may Allah's blessings be upon our master Muhammad, the beloved of hearts). (Al-Buni, Shams al-Ma'arif, Vol. 1, p. 83) For those desperate to reach the heights of spiritual fulfillment in one giant leap, these meticulously crafted prayers might seem to offer a shortcut to everything they crave—far more enticing than the patient, steady journey through the Quran itself.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Buni, p. 83

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 143

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 102

<sup>50</sup> For details, see Mir Waliuddin, op. cit., p. 203

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Nubuwwat*, as quoted by Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Maqalat-e-Ehsani*, Karachi, 1959, p. 317

<sup>52</sup> Tafsir Bayan al-Quran

<sup>53</sup> *Maqalat-e-Ehsani*, op. cit., p. 382

<sup>54</sup> Take, for example, the introduction to Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Quran translation, where you'll find an array of so-called Quranic properties and their mystical numeric charts. In the world of talismans and rituals, the mere claim that these charts were associated with a revered figure or glimpsed in

a dream was often enough to grant them legitimacy. Sadly, our scholars and researchers never really dug deep to question the Quranic validity of these numerological practices. Instead, they just passed this stuff down, generation after generation, without much thought. And if those earlier figures were less than credible—say, like Al-Buni or Ibn Arabi—later scholars slowly but surely elevated them to positions of trust and authority. The end result? What was once considered fringe, even questionable, is now accepted, normalized, and woven into the fabric of mainstream religious thought.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, referenced in *Maqalat-e-Ehsani*, p. 381.

<sup>56</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book of Virtues of the Quran.

<sup>57</sup> Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliya* (Urdu) translated by Ijazul Haq Quddusi, Lahore 1980, p. 577.

<sup>58</sup> Referenced in *Mujarrabat-e-Deerbi*, Mir Waliuddin, p. 157.

<sup>59</sup> Mir Waliuddin, referenced on pp. 137-138.

<sup>60</sup> Mentioned in Tafsir al-Ara'is and Tafsir al-Kawashi.

<sup>61</sup> Mir Waliuddin, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 183

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 146

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 147

<sup>65</sup> Allama Ahmad al-Deerwi, referenced by Mir Waliuddin, p. 147.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Buni, Vol. 1, p. 110.

<sup>67</sup> Mir Waliuddin, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 152

<sup>69</sup> Dalil al-Arifin (Session 7) in *Hasht Bihisht*, translated by Ansar Sabri, Lahore 1996, p. 98.

<sup>70</sup> Referenced in *Risala Ata al-Manan* by Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, The Reality of Sufism, published in Lahore, p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> *Tasawwuf ki Haqiqat*, p. 175

<sup>72</sup> Syed Abdul Quddus Hashmi, *Maqalat wa Malfuzat-e-Iqbal Ahmad Siddiqi* (compiled), Karachi 1991, p. 254.

<sup>73</sup> The "Ha" (ه) character holds a mystic significance, steeped in esoteric interpretations that are invoked for divine favor. The supplication goes like this:

"اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِالْهَاءِ مِنْ اسْمِكَ الْأَعْظَمِ وَبِالْيَمِثِ الْعَصِيِّ وَالْأَنْفِ الْمُقْوَمِ وَبِالْمِيمِ الْكَلِمِيسِ الْأَثَرِ وَبِالْمُسْلَمِ وَبِالْأَرْبَعَةِ الَّتِي هِيَ كَالْكَفِّ يَلَا مَعْصَمَ وَبِالْهَاءِ الْمَشْفُوقَةِ وَالْوَاوِ الْمُعْظَمِ صُورَةَ اسْمِكَ الشَّرِيفِ الْأَعْظَمِ أَنْ تُصَلِّيَ عَلَيَّ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ بِعَدَدِ كُلِّ حَرْفٍ بِهِ الْقَلَمُ تَقْضِي حَاجَتِي وَهِيَ كَذَا وَكَذَا"

"O Allah, by the 'Ha' of Your Greatest Name, by the obedient thorn, by the straightened nose, by the solitary 'Meem', by the peaceful one, by the four that are like a palm without a wrist, by the split 'Ha' and the mighty 'Waw' that mirrors the image of Your Most Majestic Name, I ask You. Bless our Prophet Muhammad, in the number of every letter that the pen has ever etched, and grant my wish, which is this and that." (And here, you're supposed to insert your own wish; al-Buni, p. 133).

<sup>74</sup> *Tasawwuf ki Haqiqat*, op. cit., p. 181"

<sup>75</sup> Refer to Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *A'mal Qur'ani*, Farid Book Depot, Delhi, pp. 43, 62, 65.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>81</sup> Narrated by Tirmidhi, who said this is a hasan sahih (good and authentic) hadith with a gharib (rare) chain of transmission, referenced in *Fazail-e-Amaal*, vol. 1, Book of Virtues of the Quran, Delhi 1997, p. 505.

<sup>82</sup> There's a story floating around that's attributed to Ali, claiming that if you recite Surah Al-Fatiha four times, it's like you've given four thousand dinars to charity. And if you recite Surah Al-Ikhlās three times, it's as though you've read the entire Quran. It's the kind of mystical math that's meant to astonish, found in some old copies of Pakistani Panj Surah, printed by Farid Book Depot in Delhi, on page 20.

<sup>83</sup> Referenced in *Fazail-e-Amaal*, vol. 1, p. 537

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 538

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 540

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. 509

<sup>89</sup> *Tasawwuf Ki Haqiqat*, p. 162.

<sup>90</sup> In the final hours before his death, Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi made a rather elaborate request for his Fatiha feast. He asked for ice-cold milk, chicken biryani, shami kebabs, parathas, cream, firni, urad dal spiced with ginger, meat-filled pastries, apple juice, pomegranate juice, and even a bottle of soda. It was a menu that seemed to reflect more of a last indulgence than a solemn religious rite, capturing a moment that was as much about earthly cravings as it was about spiritual departure.

(*Wasaya Sharif*, Abul Ulaei Press, Agra, pp. 9-10)

<sup>91</sup> Pakistani Panj Surah, op. cit., p. 135

<sup>92</sup> *Dalil al-Arifeen*, sayings of Moinuddin Ajmeri compiled by Khwaja Qutb Alam Bakhtiyar Kaki, in *Hasht Bihisht* (A collection of sayings of the Chishti saints), translated by Ansar Sabri, Lahore 1996, p. 76

<sup>93</sup> *Rahat al-Muhibbin*, sayings of Nizamuddin Auliya compiled by Amir Khusro, in *Hasht Bihisht*, p. 651

<sup>94</sup> *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, Lahore 1398 AH, p. 46, and *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Egypt 1352 AH, vol. 1, p. 73. Scholars of Hadith have deemed this Hadith to be fabricated. See Mulla Tahir Patni, *Tadhkirat al-Mawdu'at*, 1342 AH, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> "For a disciple, a spiritual guide (Sheikh) is essential... and whoever does not have a Sheikh will inevitably follow the path of Satan." (*Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 65.)

The tradition of spiritual allegiance, or Bay'ah, and the notion of inner spiritual succession—this idea of a secret chain of command—didn't just spring up overnight. Even the so-called founding figure of the Sufi orders, who Sufis have exalted to a level surpassing both sainthood and prophethood, known as the "Ghaus-e-Azam," wasn't originally associated with any such practice. There's no credible evidence that Abdul Qadir Jilani himself ever proposed the concept of Batini Khilafah or laid out the framework for Sufi orders. The structure and organization of the Qadiri order, in fact, are more of a posthumous homage, shaped by his disciples and kin, who turned him into this mythical figurehead of a spiritual empire he never claimed to rule.

<sup>96</sup> Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, *Awarif al-Ma'arif*, Egypt 1292 AH, vol. 1, p. 53

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Amir Hasan Sanjari, *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, Lahore 1966, p. 392

<sup>99</sup> Awarif al-Ma'arif, op. cit., p. 53

<sup>100</sup> "وَكَاثَتْ بَيْعَةُ الْإِسْلَامِ مَتْرُوكَةً فِي زَمَنِ الْخُلَفَاءِ أَمَّا فِي زَمَنِ الرَّاشِدِينَ مِنْهُمْ فَلَأَنَّ دُخُولَ النَّاسِ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ فِي "أَيَّامِهِمْ كَانَ غَالِبًا بِالْقَهْرِ وَالسَّيْفِ، لَا بِالتَّالِيفِ وَإِظْهَارِ الْبُرْهَانِ وَلَا طَوْعًا وَرَغْبَةً."

Shah Waliullah, *Al-Qawl al-Jameel*, 1260 AH, p. 8

<sup>101</sup> It's said that Nizamuddin Auliya would take bai'at—a pledge of spiritual allegiance—from anyone and everyone, regardless of their status. He was confident because his own Sheikh, Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, had assured that all his disciples were guaranteed a place in paradise. Ganj Shakar had promised his followers so firmly that he wouldn't even step into paradise without them, as if the gates of heaven wouldn't open unless he brought them along, as detailed in *Siyar al-Awliya*, pages 348-349.

<sup>102</sup> Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlvi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar*, translated by Muhammad Iqbaluddin Ahmed, Karachi 1963, p. 45

<sup>103</sup> See: Abdulrahman Badawi, *Shatahat al-Sufiya*, Beirut 1976, Vol. 1, pp. 98-99

<sup>104</sup> Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Tazkiyah e Ihsan or Tasawwuf wa Sulook*, Lucknow 1979, p. 112

Professor Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, in his reference to the treatise "Ahwal Pirhan Chisht," claimed that Khwaja Ajmeri possessed a spiritual power so profound that just a glance from him could halt a person from committing sins (*Tareekh Mashayekh Chisht*, Delhi 1980, Vol. 1, p. 202). If these stories attributed to the mystics are to be believed, it would suggest that they possessed a gift even greater than that of the Prophet Muhammad, who was not granted such miraculous vision; after all, had he been, would Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab have remained defiant in their disbelief?

<sup>105</sup> Amir Hasan Sanjari, *Fawaid al-Fuad*, Lucknow 1885, p. 430.

<sup>106</sup> Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, *Fawaid al-Salikin*, Delhi 1310 AH, p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Allama Rashid Rida, in his take on the "Ruh al-Qudus" (Holy Spirit), reimagines the phrase {وايدناه بروح القدس} as more than just ethereal; he frames it as the very essence of divine revelation that empowered Prophet Isa (Jesus).



<sup>108</sup> There's a story in *Rahat al-Qulub*, the collected sayings of Khwaja Fariduddin Ganj Shakar as recorded by Nizamuddin Auliya, that goes like this: When it was time for a young man to die, Azrael, the Angel of Death, went looking for him but couldn't find him, even after searching from the east to the west. Azrael returned, confused. The command came to search a specific forest, but even there, the Angel of Death came up empty-handed. The response? "You cannot see our beloved ones; they leave this world immersed in our remembrance, beyond your reach." As the verse puts it:

در کوئے تو عاشقان چنان جاں به دہند      کا نجا ملک الموت نہ گنجد ہرگز

"In your alley, lovers surrender their souls,

A place where even the Angel of Death dares not go."

(*Hasht Bahisht*, p. 232)

<sup>109</sup> Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (translated by Abdul Qadir Siddiqui), "Fas Kalimah Nabawiyyah fi Kalimah 'Isawiyyah," op. cit., pp. 261-262.

<sup>110</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Madhnun Bihi 'ala Ghayri Ahlihi*, s. 20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>112</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Hama'at* (Urdu trans.) *Tasawwuf ki Haqiqat aur us ka Falsafah*, Deoband 1969, p. 104.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 150

<sup>114</sup> Tales of spirits returning and encounters with the departed are scattered throughout Malfuzat, collections that often blur the lines between reality and mysticism. But let's focus on the words of those whose brand of moderate Sufism has found widespread acceptance in the Muslim world. Shah Waliullah's father, Shah Abdul Rahim, recounted a moment so surreal it felt like a scene from another realm. His sister lay on her deathbed, surrounded by women steeped in despair. And then, he saw it—his late father, who had long passed away, suddenly appeared, claiming he had come to see the girl. His father approached her, comforted her with gentle words, "Daughter, your suffering is almost over; by morning, God willing, you'll be well." And just like that, he turned to leave. Shah Abdul Rahim, caught between wonder and disbelief, followed him, all the while grappling with the impossible fact that his father was dead. By the end of that very day, his sister passed away, freed from her long and painful illness. It was a moment where the boundary between life and death seemed to dissolve, leaving only

questions and a haunting sense of the inexplicable. (*Dawat-e-Arwah* by Muhammad Arshad Qadri, pp. 254-255). It is said that Shah Abdul Aziz, a distinguished scholar from the Waliullah family and the grandson of Shah Waliullah, experienced a remarkable vision during his first completion of the Taraweeh prayers. In this vision, Abu Huraira appeared, clad in armor and carrying a flag, inquiring about the whereabouts of the Prophet Muhammad. He had previously declared that he would be attending Abdul Aziz's completion of the Taraweeh prayers that night.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Arabi wrote:

فإن النبوة التي انقطعت بوجود رسول الله ﷺ إنما هي نبوة التشريع لا مقامها... فهو الذي انقطع وسد بابه لا "مقام النبوة" (الفتوحات المكية، ج ٢، ص ٣).

The kind of prophethood that ceased with the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the legislative one, not the essence of prophethood itself. It's that particular door that has been shut, while the spiritual rank of prophethood remains untouched (*Al-Futuh al-Makkiyah*, vol. 2, p. 3).

<sup>116</sup> By splitting prophethood into categories—legislative and non-legislative—the door was left wide open for ordinary people to lay claim to the latter. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani saw this opening and seized it, declaring himself a prophet who received direct revelation from God, even without a new law to enforce. To back his claim, he pointed to Quranic verses like {لهم البشرى في الحياة الدنيا} (Yunus: 10) and {تنزل عليهم الملائكة} (Ha-Mim Sajdah: 30), along with hadiths that spoke of the "muhaddath," a figure who receives divine communication. While the Muslim community was shocked by Ghulam Ahmad's audacity, they seemed to overlook those who had been making similar claims for centuries—only, these were veiled under the guise of sainthood rather than outright prophethood. The notion of non-legislative prophethood, which is essentially just another term for sainthood, has found a comfortable home within the Muslim world. As the author of "Ruh al-Ma'ani" puts it, "ان النبوة عامة وخاصة والتي لا زوق لهم فيها هي الخاصة اعني نبوة التشريع", "وهي مقام خاص في الولاية و اما النبوة العامة فهي مستمرة سارية في اكابر الرجال غير منقطعة دنيا و اخرى". This idea that non-legislative or general prophethood is simply another name for sainthood or inspired individuals (muhaddath) is a subtle, almost

insidious, attempt to crack open the seal of final prophethood. And while we're at it, those narratives about the virtues of the first three caliphs and the merits of Ali? They need to be seen through the lens of their specific political context, not taken at face value.

<sup>117</sup> *Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 176.

<sup>118</sup> *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, published in Egypt, 1352 AH, Vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah al-Baligha*, Egypt, 1322 AH, Vol. 2, p. 154.

<sup>120</sup> In the enigmatic universe of Sufi thought, Alam-e-Mithal—the World of Imaginal Forms—emerges as a fascinating space, suspended between the ethereal realm of spirits and the gritty reality of flesh and bone. It's a place where visions bloom in the minds of the mystically inclined, where the truths of higher worlds are cloaked in the language of metaphor and dream. Imam Ghazali, with his characteristic insight, names this realm Imaginative Representation, where the divine truths take on shapes that can be grasped by the heart. But Shah Waliullah pushes the boundaries further, positing that between the physical world and this imaginal one, there exists yet another layer of reality—Barzakh. This is the twilight zone, the mysterious threshold, where the material and the metaphysical meet. And it is in this shadowy frontier, Shah Waliullah contends, that the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey, the Mi'raj, unfolded—a passage not just through space, but through the very fabric of existence itself. (*Hujjatullah al-Baligha*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 10).

<sup>121</sup> *Quwat al-Qulub*, op.cit., p. 124.

<sup>122</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa*, Egypt, 1391 AH, p. 176.

<sup>123</sup> Mention of Sheikh Akbar Ibn Arabi, (Introduction) Urdu translation of *Fusus al-Hikam, Mutabi' Mujtaba'i*, Lucknow, 1909, p. 23.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> "This is a secret between Me and My beloved ones, My saints, and My chosen ones. I place it in their hearts, and neither a close angel nor a sent prophet can access it."

Jalaluddin Suyuti, Lucknow, 1303 AH, p. 44.

<sup>126</sup> *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, op.cit., Vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, Vol. 3, p. 21.

<sup>129</sup> علماء ظواہر در امور دین، اخبار غیبیہ را مخصوص بہ اخبار پیغمبران می‌دانند علیہم الصلوٰت و التسلیمات و دیگران را در آن اخبار شرکت نمی‌دهند. این معنی منافی وراثت است و نفی است بر بسیاری از علوم و معارف صحیح کہ بہ این متین تعلق دارند. آری، احکام شرعی مربوط بہ ادلہ اربعہ است کہ الہام را در آن گنجایشی نیست. اما امور دینی ماورای احکام شرعی بسیار است کہ اصل خامس در آنجا الہام است، بلکہ می‌توان گفت کہ اصل ثالث الہام است بعد از کتاب و سنت. این اصل تا انقراض عالم برپا است. (مکتوب، ج ۲، ص ۵۵، مطبوعہ نول کشور)

The scholars who focus on the outward aspects of religion view the knowledge of the unseen (اخبار غیبیہ) as something exclusive to the Prophets (peace and blessings be upon them), excluding others from participating in this domain. This perspective contradicts the concept of spiritual inheritance (وراثت) and denies the validity of many sciences and knowledge that are closely tied to this foundation. It's true that legal rulings (احکام شرعی) are based on the four established sources of Islamic jurisprudence (ادلہ اربعہ), where inspiration (الہام) has no place. However, beyond these legal rulings, there exist many religious matters where inspiration is considered a fifth source of guidance. In fact, one might even argue that inspiration is the third source after the Quran and Sunnah. This principle will endure until the end of time. (Letter, Vol. 2, p. 55, published by Naval Kishore)

<sup>130</sup> Shah Waliullah, Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah, Bijnor, 1936, Vol. 2, p. 28; also see Fuyud al-Haramayn, p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> Ham'at, Urdu translation, op.cit., p. 59.

<sup>132</sup> Ali Usman Jalabi, known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, (translation) *Kashf al-Mahjub*, Lahore, 1993, pp. 258-9.

<sup>133</sup> بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، یا حی یا قیوم یا حنان یا منان یا بدیع السماوات والأرض یا ذوالجلال والإکرام، استلک أن تحیی قلبی بنور معرفتک، یا الله، یا الله، یا الله. (سیرالاولیاء، ص ۶۶)

<sup>134</sup> The devotees of Shah Waliullah have a way of romanticizing his life, spinning tales that elevate his every action to something almost divine. They fervently spread the belief that he holds the blessed pen of the Prophet Muhammad—a pen that is said to carry the weight of authority, enough to silence any doubts. Shah Abdul Aziz, his son, recalls that after his father

returned from the sacred sands of Hijaz, something profound had shifted within him. His spirit was ignited, his words sharper, more profound, as if they carried the very breath of the divine.

This metamorphosis, Shah Abdul Aziz insists, was born from a dream—a vision that his father had in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In this dream, Shah Waliullah finds himself in a room where Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn enter. Hasan holds a pen, but it's not just any pen; it's the pen of their grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad. Its tip is broken, and Hasan, with the air of someone handling a sacred relic, intends to pass it to Shah Waliullah. But then, almost as if realizing the gravity of the moment, he pauses and says, "Wait, let Husayn fix it." Husayn takes the pen, restores it, and hands it to Shah Waliullah.

It's no surprise that this dream became a kind of folklore among his followers. They began to whisper, then shout, that the unparalleled clarity and depth in Shah Waliullah's writings—the way his words seemed to cut through the fog of uncertainty—was all thanks to this blessed pen. By sharing such dreams, his followers weren't just telling stories; they were crafting a narrative, one that suggested Shah Waliullah's writings were more than just scholarly works—they were fulfilling a role that, in a different time, might have been seen as nothing less than prophetic.

(See Mokhtasar Sawaneh Hayat Shah Waliullah by Ubaidullah Salbi, translation of Ham'at under the title *Tasawwuf ki Haqiqat aur Us ka Falsafa-e-Tarikh*, op. cit., p. 43)

<sup>135</sup> A striking example of this phenomenon is Professor Tahir-ul-Qadri, a man whose mission is said to be under the direct supervision of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Tahir-ul-Qadri claims, with the kind of confidence that only comes from a divine encounter, that the Prophet (peace be upon him) delivered him a message: "Work for the elevation of Allah's religion, serve my Sunnah, and assist my Ummah. I am entrusting you with this mission." In an interview with Qaumi Digest, the Patron-in-Chief of Minhaj-ul-Quran recounted how he stood in the presence of the Prophet in his dream, overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy. He confessed, "I am unworthy, weak,

and full of faults. I am not capable of carrying out this task." But the Prophet, in a moment that would forever change the course of his life, reassured him: "Begin your work, and Allah will grant you the ability and the resources. Establish the Minhaj-ul-Quran organization, and I promise you, I will come to your institution in Lahore."

He went on to say, with a sense of destiny woven into his words: "The Prophet Muhammad himself gave my father the glad tidings of my birth, telling him that a son would come in my form. And then, twelve years later, the Prophet returned in a vision to my father, saying, 'Tahir has now reached the age of understanding—it's time to fulfill your promise.'"

(Reference: *Daily Jang*, Lahore, dated November 14, 1986)

<sup>136</sup> In the Quran, the word Wilayah isn't about bestowing some elevated, mystical status; it's about the raw, undeniable reality of protection and authority. It's a reminder that Allah is the ultimate guardian, the one who holds the real power, as seen in Surah Al-Kahf (18:44). And then there's the collective bond, where believers stand as protectors of one another, like in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:55). It's not about some esoteric spiritual hierarchy—it's about who holds the reins of power and who stands by your side.

<sup>137</sup> See this statement by Sheikh Hujwiri: "ولاية اندر محل خصوص است" (Wilayah is in a place of special distinction). (*Kashf al-Mahjub*, op. cit., p. 192)

<sup>138</sup> Refer to the words of the Hadith as mentioned in Bukhari:

عن أبي هريرة قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: "إن الله قال: من عادى لي ولياً فقد آذنته بالحرب، وما تقرب إلي عبدي بشيء أحب إلي مما افترضت عليه، ولا يزال عبدي يتقرب إلي بالنوافل حتى أحبه، فإذا أحببته كنت سمعه الذي يسمع به، وبصره الذي يبصر به، ويده التي يبطش بها، ورجله التي يمشي بها، وإن سألني لأعطينه، ولئن استعاذني لأعيذنه، وما ترددت عن شيء أنا فاعله ترددي عن نفس المؤمن، يكره الموت وأنا أكره مساءته."

(بخاري، كتاب الرقاق، باب من جاهد نفسه في طاعة الله)

Abu Huraira narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, 'Allah said: Whoever shows enmity to a friend of Mine, I shall declare war against him. My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the religious duties I have imposed upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with voluntary acts of worship until I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his

sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks Me, I will surely give him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely grant him refuge. I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of a believer, for he hates death and I hate to disappoint him.'

<sup>139</sup> *Futuh al-Ghaib*, with a Persian commentary by Sheikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlvi, Naval Kishore Press, p. 272.

<sup>140</sup> *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyah*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Arabi boldly declared himself as the "Seal of the Saints," a title dripping with the weight of spiritual inheritance. He proclaimed, "أنا خاتم الولاية" ("I am without doubt the Seal of Sainthood, inheriting the Hashimite lineage, alongside the Messiah"). And as if that wasn't enough, he drove the point home: "إني في الاتباع في صنفى كر سول الله في الانبياء" ("I am like the Messenger of Allah among the prophets, peace be upon them, and perhaps I am among those through whom Allah completes sainthood, and this is not beyond Allah's power"). It's a statement brimming with the audacity of someone who believes he's walking in the footsteps of prophets, claiming a spiritual finality that he saw as his divine right.

(*Al-Futuh al-Makkiyah*, Vol. 1, p. 319)

<sup>142</sup> *Risala Qushayriya* (translated by Dr. Muhammad Hasan), Karachi, 1964, p. 238.

<sup>143</sup> In the early days of Islam, Bay'ah—the pledge of allegiance—was a straightforward affair, meant only for the Amir al-Mu'minin, the leader of the Muslims. But then came the Sufis, with their penchant for spiritual authority, and they took this concept and flipped it on its head. They didn't just follow the leader as the Prophet's deputy; they claimed their spiritual orders were directly connected to the Prophet himself through unbroken chains. This gave their Bay'ah a whole new dimension, one that was drenched in religious significance. Some early scholars, scrambling to make sense of this new order, even went so far as to say that these Sufi orders were

part of a divine plan, trying to legitimize a form of Bay'ah that was anything but conventional.

In his treatise Bay'ah, Shah Rafiuddin sketches a world where certain Sufi leaders, though not prophets, are still blessed by Allah with divine promises and glad tidings ("رب العزة جل شأنه ناهي يَكُ از ائمه طرف بشارتها و وعده يائے برو احسان است").

It's as if these spiritual figures carry a celestial stamp of approval—something less than prophethood, but still imbued with a sacred authority that can't be ignored. Shah Rafiuddin hints at a deeper reverence for these leaders within the Islamic tradition, suggesting they occupy a unique space in the spiritual hierarchy. He describes Bay'ah not just as a pledge, but as a vital connection to these towering spiritual figures, a way to draw on their ongoing support. "These elders continue to provide help," ("ثمره آن اتصال بآن بزرگان ست در قبر و حشر و") ("امداد ایشان این طالب را وقتاً بعد وقت beyond the grave, through the Day of Judgment, offering a lifeline whenever it's needed. (*Maqalat-e-Ihsani*, op. cit., p. 47).

In the world of Sufism, the Pir—the spiritual guide—is seen as a kind of healer for the soul, someone whose guidance is essential for any seeker hoping to achieve true spiritual healing. Without this mentorship, the path to enlightenment is almost impossible to navigate. Shah Rafiuddin, while dissecting the concept of Bay'ah, argues that, unlike the prophets, most people lack the innate ability to reach lofty spiritual goals on their own. That's precisely why Sufism holds that Allah places a person of extraordinary spiritual prowess, a Murshid, in the lives of ordinary people, to lead them toward their ultimate spiritual destiny. (op.cit., p. 55)

<sup>144</sup> In Sufism, Wasilah is that all-important middleman—the Sheikh—without whom a disciple's shot at salvation is seen as a long shot. Some Sufis take the Quranic verse about seeking a Wasilah {يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا} {يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا} and stretch it into a cosmic truth, not just about getting close to God but about dissolving into Him entirely. It's a spiritual annihilation, they say. But here's the thing: the Quran never suggests that Qurb-e-Ilahi (nearness to Allah) means Wasilah ila Allah (reaching Allah) or Fana fi Allah (annihilation in Allah), nor does it say you need an escort to reach God.



Instead, the Quran is all about direct access—no middlemen, no go-betweens. It's just you and God, with verses like {وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ} and {وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ} making it crystal clear. There's no room for the idea that you need a priest or a Sheikh to connect with the Creator; those are just fantasies, with no grounding in reality. Even those who boast about having some special Wasilah—a hotline to God—or are believed by the gullible to possess this divine connection, are actually described in the Quran as {...أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ} (Surah Al-Isra: 57). In other words, those very people you think have a backstage pass to the Almighty are themselves scrambling for closeness and favor with their Lord. This is the real deal when it comes to Wasilah—the Quran's way of telling you that the only thing you should be seeking is your own closeness to God. It's about walking the straight and narrow, keeping your piety intact, and remembering that there's a day coming—a day so intense it will shake even the strongest to their core. The Quran captures this with brutal clarity: {يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحْذُورًا} (Surah Al-Isra: 57).

In the world of Sufism, they see themselves as the middlemen, the go-betweens, bridging the gap between God and His seekers. The idea is that if you really want something from God, you don't go straight to Him—you go through these spiritual powerhouses. Without their intercession, they say, your prayers don't stand a chance. It's all laid out in Akhbar al-Akhyar, where Abdul Qadir Jilani is quoted as saying, "Anyone who seeks my help in distress or calls out to me, their distress will be removed; whoever asks Allah through my intercession, their need will be fulfilled." This is the mindset that fuels prayers like "يا شيخ عبد القادر جيلاني شفيئنا لله" ("O Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, help us for the sake of Allah"), a plea you'll hear often in Sufi circles. And it doesn't stop there. There's even a special prayer called Salat al-Ghawthiyya attributed to Abdul Qadir Jilani, where after you're done, you turn towards Iraq and ask for God's help, with Abdul Qadir as your cosmic go-between.

<sup>145</sup> 'Awarif al-Ma'arif, op.cit., Volume 1, p. 48.

<sup>146</sup> In the Quran, you'll find 93 verses about Jesus, 131 about Noah, and 235 about Abraham. But when it comes to Moses, the count skyrockets to 502.

<sup>147</sup> *Kitab al-Luma'*, p. 66

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>150</sup> *Hamd'at* (Urdu translation), op.cit., p. 115

<sup>151</sup> *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, op.cit., Vol. 4, p. 112

<sup>152</sup> *Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, op.cit., p. 47

<sup>153</sup> *Kitab al-Luma'*, p. 515

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 516

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 517

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 531

<sup>157</sup> *Fusus al-Hikam* (translated by Abdul Qadir Siddiqui), op.cit., p. 415

<sup>158</sup> *Al-Qawl al-Mansur*, p. 94

<sup>159</sup> Quoted on the authority of Sha'arani in *Tasawuf ki Haqeeqat*, p. 103

<sup>160</sup> *Kalam al-Marghub*, translation of *Kashf al-Mahjub*, p. 443

<sup>161</sup> The philosophy of Wahdat al-Wujud—that heady, intoxicating idea of the Unity of Existence—has seeped into the very fabric of Eastern poetry. This isn't just any poetry; it's poetry that's been enshrined as religious truth, doing the work that Sufi philosophy couldn't quite manage on its own. Where the dense texts of mysticism fell short, popular verse picked up the slack. Whether it's the soul-stirring sama sessions of the Sufis, the gripping tales spun by storytellers, or the fire-and-brimstone sermons that make you sweat the afterlife, the magic lies in the verses, the songs, the lines that have become part of our collective religious consciousness. Rumi, Hafiz, Sanai—they're not just poets; they're spiritual heavyweights, despite their cryptic, layered musings. Their poetry isn't just read—it's revered. In fact, some see Hafiz's *Diwan* as almost oracular, turning to it to divine the future or seek out answers from the cosmos.

The issue with elevating Eastern poetry to the status of sacred text is that it has allowed the often misguided reflections of poets to infiltrate and distort orthodox Muslim thought. Take Rumi, for instance—a figure so revered in academic circles that he's been crowned with the title *Maulana-e-Rum*, and his *Masnawi* is celebrated as an unparalleled wellspring of spiritual wisdom. Even a mind as sharp as Allama Iqbal's places him on a pedestal, calling him

Pir-e-Rumi. But here's the catch: despite its poetic brilliance, the Masnavi functions like a crypt for Islamic thought, where traditional beliefs have been subtly but decisively eroded. Consider the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud—this audacious notion of the Unity of Existence. Rumi has done more to mainstream this controversial, nearly heretical idea than his forerunners, Hallaj, Bistami, or even Ibn Arabi, ever managed to do:

ہر لحظہ بشکلِ بتِ عیارِ برآمد دل نہاں شد  
 ہر دم بلباسِ دگر، آن یارِ برآمد، گہ پیر و جوان شد  
 خود کوزه و خود کوزه گر و خود گلی کوزه، خود رند و سبوکش  
 خود بر سرِ آن کوزه خریدارِ برآمد، بشکست و زندان شد  
 خود گشت صراحی و ے، ساغر و ساقی خود بزم نشین شد  
 خود آن ے و سرمست بازارِ برآمد، شود دل و جان شد

Every moment, the hidden beloved appeared in the form of a charming idol  
 Constantly changing attire, sometimes appearing as old, sometimes as young

The beloved became the clay, the potter, and the flower of the clay; the rogue  
 and the carefree

Then emerged as the buyer of that clay pot, broke it, and became a sage

The beloved turned into the wine jug, the wine, the cup, and the cupbearer,  
 and joined the gathering

Then the beloved became the wine itself, went to the market intoxicated,  
 and became the soul and life

This whole existential vibe drove Sanai to declare:

در مذهبِ عاشقان یک رنگ      ابلیس و محمد است یک سنگ

"In the world of true lovers, Satan and Muhammad are just two shades of the  
 same color,

Two faces of the same coin."

When the line between Creator and creation blurs, even the most crude and  
 outrageous verses somehow get a pass as religious poetry:

وہی جو مستوی عرش تھا خدا ہو کر      اتر پڑا ہے مدینے میں مصطفیٰ ہو کر

The One who was enthroned as God

Has descended to Medina as Mustafa (Prophet Muhammad)

نگاہِ عاشق کی دیکھ لیتی ہے پردہٴ میم کو اٹھا کر  
 وہ بزمِ یثرب میں آ کے بیٹھیں ہزار منہ کو چھپا چھپا کر

The lover's gaze pierces through the veil of the letter "M"

As He sits in the gathering of Yathrib (Medina), concealing His divine essence behind many veils.

Even someone as steeped in Sharia as Ahmed Raza Khan has to concede that when it comes to capturing the real essence of the Prophet Muhammad, it's like trying to grasp the wind. As Ahmed Raza Khan himself says:

ہوالاول ہو الآخر ہو الظاہر ہو الباطن      بکل شیء علیم، لوح محفوظ خدا تم ہو  
نہ ہو سکتے ہیں دو اول، نہ ہو سکتے ہیں دو آخر      تو اول اور آخر ابتداء تم انتہا تم ہو  
خدا کہتے نہیں بنتی، جُدا کہتے نہیں بنتی،      خدا ہی پر یہ چھوڑا ہے، وہی جائے کہ کیا تم ہو

He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden

All-knowing, you are the Preserved Tablet of God

There can't be two Firsts, nor can there be two Lasts

You are the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End

It's hard to call you God, yet it's hard to call you separate from God

We leave it to God—only He knows what you truly are.

Punjabi poets have been way more impactful in spreading the idea of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Existence). Just look at Bulleh Shah, who says it like this:

واہ سوہنیاں! تیری چال عجائب، لٹکان نال چلیندیے ہو  
آپے ظاہر و آپے باطن، آپے لُک لُک بہندے ہو  
آپے ملاں، آپے قاضی، آپے علم پڑھیندیے ہو  
ہُن کس تھیں آپ چھپائیدا

Wow, beautiful one! Your walk is full of wonder

You move with such grace and allure

You are both the seen and the unseen, playing hide and seek with yourself

You are the mullah, you are the judge, you are the one who reads the scriptures

Now, where can you hide from yourself?

کہتے ملاں ہو بُلیندیے او  
کہتے سنت فرض و سیندیے او  
کہتے مَتَّہے تِلک لگائیدا  
ہُن کس تھیں آپ چھپائیدا

Sometimes you speak like a mullah

Sometimes you observe religious duties

Sometimes you wear a tilak on your forehead

Now, where can you hide from yourself?

بید پراناں پڑھ پڑھ تھکے  
 سجدے کردیاں گھس گئے مٹھے  
 ناں رب تیرتھ، ناں رب مکے  
 جس پایا، اُس نور انوار  
 عشق دی نویں نویں بہار

Worn out from reading ancient scriptures  
 Foreheads rubbed raw from countless prostrations  
 But God is neither in pilgrimage sites nor in Mecca  
 Those who found Him, found the Light of all lights  
 And with it, a fresh bloom of love springs forth endlessly

Another esteemed Sufi poet, Khawaja Farid, cuts through the illusions:

نہ کوئی آدم نہ کوئی شیطان      بن گئی کل کوڑ کہانی

There's no Adam, no Satan,  
 It's all just one big, made-up story.

In other words, the whole tale of Adam and Satan is just that—a tale, with no roots in reality. When everything is Him, and nothing exists beyond Him, the whole idea of good and evil, sin and reward, just falls apart. So what's left for the seeker to do?

بہ مے سجادہ رنگیں کن، گرت پیر مغان گوید  
 کہ سالک بے خبر نبود از راہ و رسم منزلہا

Stain your prayer mat with wine if the wise old guide says so,  
 Because the true seeker knows the twists and turns of the journey well.  
 (Most of these verses are borrowed from Syed Ali Abbas Jalalpuri's collection *Wahdat al-Wujud te Punjabi Shayari*.)

<sup>162</sup> *Hama'at* (Urdu translation), op. cit., p. 132

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133

<sup>164</sup> Ibn Arabi—whose works like *Futuhāt* and *Fusus* are bursting with outlandish theories and mystical ideas that don't exactly align with Islam—still holds the title of Sheikh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master) in the hearts of many Muslims. The reverence for him runs so deep that even with all his philosophical puzzles laid bare, the bravest scholars haven't dared to outright reject him. Even those who've tiptoed around critiquing his ideas have

stopped short of striking directly at the icon of Sheikh al-Akbar. Take Mujaddid Alif Thani, for example—he tried to build the concept of Wahdat al-Shuhud as a counter to Ibn Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud, but even he couldn't help but warn that "منکر او در خطر است"—"The denier is in danger." Ahmad Sirhindi's words leave no room for doubt: questioning Ibn Arabi's greatness or sainthood was like putting your faith on the line. (Quoted in Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Maqalat-e-Ehsani*, p. 355)

<sup>165</sup> Anfas al-Arifin, referenced in *Tasawuf ki Haqiqat*, p. 135

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 93

<sup>167</sup> Shah Syed Mahmood Zouqi, *Sirr-e-Dilbaran*, Karachi 1405 AH, p. 40

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 349

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 367

<sup>170</sup> In Sufism, the mystical power of letters comes from the idea of the "Six Descents" (Tanzilat Sittah). According to this belief, all divine descents appear in the form of circles. The second descent also takes the shape of a circle, which Sufis say is split into a pole and two arcs. One arc is said to contain divine truths, with twenty-eight of God's names inscribed, while the other arc is tied to cosmic truths, holding the manifestations of the sacred letters. These 28 letters are believed by certain practitioners to hold the key to all sorts of mystical manipulations, and they're convinced that unraveling the mystery of these letters is essentially unlocking the secrets of divinity itself.

Take a look at the table of cosmic letters' secrets (اسرار حروف کونی):



Check out the table of the Six Descents (تنزلات ستّه):



إن الإنسان الكامل هو القطب الذي تدور عليه الأفلاك الوجود من أوله إلى آخره وهو واحد منذ كان " <sup>171</sup> الوجود إلى أبد الأبدين ثم له تنوع في الملابس ويظهر في الكنائس فيسعى باعتبار لباس ولا يسعى لباس آخر فاسمه الأصلي الذي هو له محمد وكنيته أبو القاسم ووصفه عبد الله ولقبه شمس الدين ثم له باعتبار ملابس "أخرى أسماء وله في كل زمان اسم يليق بلباسه في ذلك الزمان (عبد الكريم الجيلي، الإنسان الكامل، مطبوعه مصر ١٣١٦هـ، ج ٢، ص ٤٦)

"The Perfect Man is the axis around which the entire universe spins, from the dawn of existence to its endless eternity. He's been one and the same since the beginning of time, yet he takes on different forms, showing up in various places of worship. Depending on the form he takes, he's called by different names. His original name is Muhammad, his nickname is Abu al-Qasim, he's described as Abdullah, and his title is Shams al-Din. But with each new manifestation, he takes on a new name, one that fits the era and the guise he's wearing at that time."

<sup>172</sup> D. Pinto, *Piri-Muridi Relationship*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 86-87.

<sup>173</sup> *Tazkirah Sheikh al-Akbar Ibn Arabi*, in the introduction to the translation of *Fusus al-Hikam*, op. cit., p.18.

<sup>174</sup> In *Futuhat* (Chapter 24), Ibn Arabi recounts an encounter with seventy aqtab—spiritual poles—who met him in a mysterious cave on Mount Qubays in Mecca. According to Ibn Arabi, a qutb doesn't have disciples, nor does he guide anyone along the spiritual path. Instead, he simply continues to offer

advice and wisdom. Ibn Arabi believed that figures like Abu Sa'ud Shibli and Abdul Qadir Jilani were aqtab of their time (pp. 691-692).

The great Sufi masters hold that aqtab are privy to the same divine knowledge that sets prophets apart, and that they wield a kind of cosmic authority because of their elevated status. Ibn Arabi went so far as to say that Shibli and Abdul Qadir were divinely appointed to exercise this power. Yet, there have been others who, while not officially appointed by God, still took it upon themselves to exert influence over the world. Muhammad Awani is one such figure who faced significant trials because of it.

<sup>175</sup> *Tazkirah Sheikh al-Akbar Ibn Arabi*, in the introduction to the translation of *Fusus al-Hikam*, op. cit., p.19.

<sup>176</sup> Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan, in *Al-Amn wa al-Ula*, claims that the sun doesn't even rise until it first pays its respects to Ghaus-e-Azam (Abdul Qadir Jilani). He attributes a statement to Abdul Qadir Jilani himself, saying that when a new year begins, it greets him and tells him everything that's going to happen. The same goes for a new day or a new month—they all greet him and reveal the future to him before anything else happens.

<sup>177</sup> The Six Descents (Tanzilat Sittah)—sometimes known as Tayyinat (determinations), Tajalliyat (manifestations), or Taqayyudat (limitations)—is an imaginative, mystical take on the creation of the universe. This concept, rather than drawing from the Quran or other divine scriptures, is rooted in mystical Sufi texts, often clashing head-on with Quranic thought. Ibn Arabi may have carved out this idea, but despite all the work later Sufis put into it, they still haven't managed to nail down a clear, universally accepted framework for these Six Descents. As mentioned before, Tanzilat Sittah tries to map out the stages of divine manifestation in the universe, driven by the notion that the universe is merely a reflection or shadow of God's essence—and that God is present everywhere, taking on different forms within the cosmos.

In the Sufi view, God felt the need to take the path of Tanzilat—these mystical descents—because He wanted to be known, echoing the saying: "كنت كثرًا مخفيا" ("I was a hidden treasure"). Even after these descents, God's essential



nature remained unchanged—الآن كما كان ("as it was before")—but His essence took on a new form. In the language of Shuhud (witnessing), His shadow assumed a new existence. They point to the verse {أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظِّلَّ} ("Have you not seen how your Lord extends the shadow?") (Al-Furqan: 45) to back up this idea.

The Sufi idea of how the universe was created relies entirely on their own mystical visions and revelations. It's not something you can measure against reason, science, or even divine revelation. This concept is as fascinating as it is complex and almost impossible to fully grasp. You can catch a glimpse of this intricate idea in the diagram below, which we've borrowed from the well-known Sufi text *Sirr-e-Dilbaran*.

See reference: 170.

<sup>178</sup> In the mystical world, they say the room is filled with Rijal al-Ghayb—the Men of the Unseen. In Sufi speak, these are the enigmatic figures who travel in a precise pattern throughout the week, moving from north to south, east to west. Their movements are said to bring both blessings and disaster. When they reverse course, it's believed that trouble is on the horizon. But if your path happens to align with theirs, everything falls into place, and success is almost guaranteed. The catch? You need to know their schedule, and only those with mystical insight—the Ahl al-Kashf—have that intel. And then there's Wednesday, the day when all the Rijal al-Ghayb supposedly take a break at one specific spot, making it a day you definitely don't want to be on the road.

<sup>179</sup> The Sufi-created system of cosmic governance, where figures like the Qutb, Nujaba, Nuqaba, and Awliya are said to run the universe, is a concept that's completely foreign and non-Quranic. According to this belief, Allah has handed over some of His divine responsibilities to these chosen few. The idea even goes so far as to imply that God Himself is almost on standby, with the Qutb and his crew taking care of everything. It's said that the Qutb, along with his team—including the Ghaus—keeps the universe in check. Sometimes, the roles of Ghaus and Qutb are even believed to merge into one person. According to Ibn Arabi (Futuhāt, Chapter 383), the Qutb is the one

who protects the entire world, while two Imams keep watch over the realms of the seen and unseen. Then there are the seven Abdal, each stationed over one of the world's regions, and Ibn Arabi even claims to have met all seven. Beyond that, you've got the Afrad—those rare individuals who aren't quite Aqtab but have the potential to be. Four Awtad are set up at the four corners of the earth, and forty Nuqaba are said to be out there tending to the needs of the people. All in all, there are 300 Nuqaba doing this work. Everything that happens in the world, they say, is orchestrated by these spiritual seers who are divinely appointed. Even natural disasters and calamities are believed to unfold through their intervention. They move among ordinary people, making them nearly impossible to identify. It's also said that during Hajj, these spiritual beings hold an annual gathering in the Valley of Mina, attended by prophets too, where they decide the course of the coming year. In some Sufi circles, the Fard is seen as God's chief advisor, while in others, the Qutb is believed to be the very center of the universe.

The idea of this secret spiritual assembly has infused Sufi literature with an air of mystery. But by placing the control of the universe in the hands of these spiritual elders, it's also stripped ordinary people of any motivation to take on challenges for their own future.

<sup>180</sup> *Kitab al-Luma'*, p. 576.

<sup>181</sup> There's a story about Nizamuddin Auliya that he would have his disciples prostrate before him. In *Siyar al-Auliya*, it's recounted that once, in the presence of a new guest, a disciple named Wahiduddin Qureshi bowed down in prostration before Nizamuddin Auliya. The guest was stunned, unable to comprehend such an act. But Nizamuddin Auliya brushed off the objection, saying that this type of prostration was perfectly permissible. He argued that just as the obligations of previous communities were abrogated but their recommended practices—like fasting on Ashura—remained, so too did the tradition of prostrating before those of higher status. In earlier times, students prostrated before teachers, followers before prophets, and subjects before kings. Under the new Sharia, he claimed, prostration was still permissible. He also pointed out that their spiritual guide, Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, didn't forbid his

disciples from prostrating, so he couldn't either. To do so, he said, would risk being accused of disregarding the teachings of their spiritual masters.

(For more details, see *Siyar al-Auliya*).

<sup>182</sup> *Hama'at* (Urdu translation), op. cit., p. 242

<sup>183</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyya*, Bijnor 1936, Vol. 1, p. 85

<sup>184</sup> *Maqalat-e-Ehsani*, op. cit., p. 494

<sup>185</sup> *Hama'at* (Urdu translation), op. cit., p. 229

<sup>186</sup> In *Hama'at*, Shah Waliullah describes a journey through the realm of spirits that, according to him, transcends ordinary sainthood—something akin to the Prophets' ascension. He claims to have seen the souls of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet) in this spiritual world, where they hold an exalted status in what he calls *Hadhirat al-Quds* (the Sacred Presence). He observed various figures, Sufis, and saints from earlier times, gaining insight into their ranks and positions in the spiritual realm. Some, he says, were distinguished by their connection to spiritual grace, others by qualities of love and ecstasy, and still others by a state of detachment. Some were marked by remembrance, tranquility, or the spiritual bond known as *Nisbat-e-Owaisi*. As for Ghaus-e-Azam, Shah Waliullah reveals something profound: he was blessed with *Nisbat-e-Owaisi*, a spiritual bond of immense significance in the hierarchy of the spiritual world. This connection bestows a unique illumination, combining four key attributes—creation, sustenance, management, and divine manifestation. These are the very forces that keep the universe in motion, so someone with this bond naturally exhibits extraordinary spiritual power. Shah Waliullah explains that the bold, powerful words that Ghaus-e-Azam spoke were all rooted in this connection.

In Sufism, Ghaus-e-Azam is revered as being beyond even the prophets, so the idea of him being entrusted with controlling the universe fits right in with that belief. But what's really surprising is Shah Waliullah's audacity in claiming that he himself embodies various spiritual connections. He says that after he completed the path of *jadh* (spiritual absorption), a broad path opened up to him through all the great figures of the past. According to him, the spiritual connection he received is a mix of all seven *nisbats* (*Hama'at*, p. 197). Shah Waliullah's statements about the realm of spirits, his bold claims

about his own spiritual status, and the idea of Ghaus-e-Azam controlling the universe—it all borders on blasphemy. Even from a purely rational and scholarly standpoint, it's hard to take these ideas seriously. Centuries have passed since the time of Sheikh Abdul Qadir, so we're not exactly in a position to offer hard evidence about him. But if you dive into his writings—*Ghuniyat al-Talibeen* and *Futuh al-Ghaib*—the impression you get is far from that of a Qutb al-Waqt or Ghaus-e-Azam. In fact, even calling him a great scholar feels like a stretch. For someone supposedly in control of the universe, performing countless miracles, and accidentally letting grand statements about himself slip, you'd expect his works to be filled with credible accounts, solid traditions, and a Quranic understanding of faith. But instead, his writings are packed with dubious stories, unreliable traditions, and folklore that caters more to popular imagination than to serious theological discourse.

In *Ghuniyat al-Talibeen*, you find these lush, indulgent descriptions of heaven and hell, the tale of Bilqis dripping with fascination, and the almost hedonistic accounts of the pleasures of paradise and the Hoor al-Ayn (heavenly maidens). None of this is rooted in the Quran or authentic Hadith. These ideas seem to have trickled down to us from popular stories shared in the religious gatherings of Jewish scholars, or perhaps they were embellished by our own storytellers who layered their interpretations onto these borrowed tales. This is how these detailed portrayals of heaven and hell took shape. So, how are we supposed to believe that those who can't even demonstrate basic scholarly rigor in their writings, whose works present an alternate version of Islam, have been appointed by Allah to control the universe? For those who think that believing in Shah Waliullah's spiritual journey is essential to their faith, maybe they have no choice but to accept these absurdities as part of their belief system. But for those who believe in Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah and see the Quran as the final, definitive, and most complete divine revelation, it should be clear that there's no room for such imaginary roles in the Quranic worldview.

<sup>187</sup> Shah Waliullah argues that Sufism is an essential part of Islam, but in doing so, he twists the history of Islam, placing saints and mystics on a higher

spiritual pedestal than the companions of the Prophet. He claims to have discovered that Sufism, as we know it today, evolved through four distinct stages. In the earliest stage, during the time of the Prophet, Sufism was just getting started—focused on basic practices like fulfilling religious duties and the remembrance of God. Back then, there wasn't any emphasis on individual personalities, and things like miracles, ecstasy, and states of selflessness weren't so deeply rooted in people that they became second nature. This is how Shah Waliullah describes Sufism during the Prophet's time. But in the second phase, beginning with Syed al-Taifa Junaid Baghdadi, Sufism—or Ihsan—took on a new depth. According to Shah Waliullah, during this period, the spiritual elites underwent rigorous practices, severed ties with the world, and devoted themselves entirely to the remembrance of God. They listened to sama (spiritual music), fell into trances of ecstasy, tore their clothes, danced, and could, through spiritual insight, discern the thoughts of others. Shah Waliullah points out that at this stage, the essence of Sufism for those who had mastered it was that "they did not worship God out of fear of Hell or in hope of Heaven's rewards, but rather out of pure love for God." (*Hama'at*, p. 73)

While tawajjuh—a profound spiritual orientation towards the Divine—hadn't yet become the central focus of Sufi practice, their engagement with the deeper truths of existence was sporadic, like a flash of lightning that appears and then quickly fades away. During this period, there wasn't much discussion about the distinctions between Tawhid Wujudi (Unity of Being) and Tawhid Shuhudi (Unity of Witness), nor about the relationship between the universe and the Divine, or how one becomes absorbed in God. Concepts like fana (annihilation) and baqa (permanence) were still on the horizon, waiting to be explored.

But with the arrival of Sheikh Akbar Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi in the fourth period of Sufism, minds expanded even further. It was during this time that the stages of existence and its descents were discovered. Shah Waliullah says, "Through these great figures, the path to the First Cause, meaning God, became closer, and the light of their blessings illuminated both the higher and lower realms." (*Hama'at*, p. 76). In other words, Shah Waliullah is clearly

suggesting that the journey of Ihsan, which started in the Prophet's time, finally reached its logical endpoint with the emergence of Ibn Arabi. The spiritual states—miracles, extraordinary occurrences, and ecstatic experiences—that hadn't fully taken root in the early saints eventually came to a head in this fourth period, making the path to the First Cause more accessible.

In our opinion, only those who lack any sense of the profoundness of the Prophetic mission or the ranks of the Prophet's companions would interpret such mystical musings as being the divine inspiration of Shah Waliullah. That said, Shah Waliullah himself later reveals that all four stages of Sufism are accepted by God and hold a revered status among the higher ranks of angels (*Hama'at*, p. 77). It's hard not to feel a sense of regret for the early Muslims who, despite the presence of the Prophet and the finality of his mission, never reached the spiritual heights that Ibn Arabi's followers or the later Sufis attained. The result? Such an outpouring of grace and blessings that the realms of both heaven and earth were bathed in light (*Hama'at*, p.76).

<sup>188</sup> For details, see Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Kimiya-e-Sa'adat* (Urdu translation) by Saeed ur Rahman Alavi, Lahore, p. 303

<sup>189</sup> *Awarif al-Ma'arif*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 53

<sup>190</sup> Abdullah Farahi, *Tasawwuf: Ek Tajziati Motalea*, Aligarh 1987, p. 103

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104

<sup>192</sup> *Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Vol. 1, p. 10

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98

<sup>194</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tarikh-e-Mashaikh Chisht*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 143

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278

<sup>199</sup> Even a sharp critic like Shibli Nomani couldn't escape the spellbinding allure of the Masnavi. Shibli admits, "In all of Persian literature, whether prose or poetry, you won't find such profound, delicate, and grand topics and mysteries as are found in abundance in the Masnavi. And it's not just limited to Persian—you'd be hard-pressed to find such insights even in Arabic texts." Shibli goes on to say that it's no wonder scholars and literary experts have

paid more attention to the Masnavi than to any other work, even exaggerating to the point of calling it 'the Quran in the Pahlavi language.'" (Referenced in Nizami, Vol. 1, pp. 155-156)

<sup>200</sup> Maqalat-e-Ehsani, op. cit., p. 398.

<sup>201</sup> Refer to the booklet by Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Fi Mabadi al-Tasawwuf fi Bunyan al-Mushayyad*, Sheikh Ahmad Kabir Rifai, translated by Maulana Zafar Ahmad, Karachi, p. 137.

<sup>202</sup> Al-Buni: 30-629

<sup>203</sup> Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliya* (Urdu translation), op. cit., p. 583

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 587

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 589

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 588

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 589

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 590

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 596

<sup>211</sup> In *Siyar al-Awliya*, it's recorded that Muhammad Chishti practiced the Namaz-e-Makoos—the inverted prayer. Fariduddin Shakar, it is said, took this to another level with what's called Chilla-e-Makoos. He would hang upside down from a tree branch that extended over a well adjacent to a mosque, performing his prayers in this extraordinary inverted position. For more details, refer to Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlavi's *Akhbar al-Akhyar*, Makataba Rahimiya, Deoband, p. 59.

<sup>212</sup> *Siyar al-Awliya*, p. 729

<sup>213</sup> The *Istighfar* (seeking forgiveness) is as follows: Astaghfirullah Dhul-Jalal wal-Ikram min jami' al-dhunub wal-atham (Referenced from Amir Khurd) *Siyar al-Awliya*, p. 596

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., pp. 97-596

<sup>215</sup> *Niyat Nama*, published in Bihar Sharif, p. 18

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18

<sup>217</sup> To stir the subtle spiritual states in the *nafs-e-naatiqa*—the rational soul—some seekers with rigid temperaments are encouraged to engage in *sama* (spiritual music). Shah Waliullah suggests, "It's better if the *sama* includes

vibrant verses, sung with melody and rhythm. For those who are particularly unmoved, the music of the rabab and *tanboor* can also be beneficial.” The logic is simple: music has the same intoxicating effect as wine, stirring ecstasy and exhilaration. When pure love is combined with *sama* and poetry, even the most unyielding spirits begin to feel a shift, breaking free from their spiritual stagnation. While Shah Waliullah also advises Quranic recitation and contemplation as a path to spiritual ecstasy, he doesn’t dismiss the traditional methods practiced by those in search of *wajd*—spiritual ecstasy. (*Hama'at*, op. cit., p. 188)

<sup>218</sup> In Sufism, love is everything, but it’s not the kind of love that’s completely detached from the world. In fact, some Sufis encourage *Ishq-e-Majazi*—worldly love—as a gateway to *Ishq-e-Haqiqi*, divine love. Shah Waliullah explains that if someone is dull or rigid by nature, unable to respond to spiritual or divine influences, they should stir those feelings by falling in love with someone. Some Sufis insist that this love should be pure, free from any lustful desires. The idea is that when such a person sees their beloved, it ignites something deep within them. They crave union and fear separation. A glance from the beloved can make their heart bloom, while indifference leaves them wilting. (*Hama'at*, p. 187)

<sup>219</sup> *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Delhi 1976, R.A. Nicholson, pp. 60-61

<sup>220</sup> *Awarif*, Vol. 1, p. 109

<sup>221</sup> Abdul Rahman Jami, *Nafahat al-Uns*, Kanpur 1893, pp. 181-182

<sup>222</sup> *Siyar al-Awliya*, op. cit., p. 127

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96

<sup>228</sup> *Hama'at*, op. cit., p. 131

<sup>229</sup> For details, see Shah Waliullah, *Al-Qawl al-Jameel*, op. cit., pp. 44-45

<sup>230</sup> *Mabadi Tasawwufi Bayan al-Mushayyad*, op. cit., p. 313

<sup>231</sup> For details, see *Al-Qawl al-Jameel* and Shah Waliullah's experience of witnessing the truth and its methods in *Hama'at*



<sup>232</sup> *Kashf al-Mahjoob*, p. 223

<sup>233</sup> Refer to: Abu Hamid Muhammad Ghazali, *Kimiya-e-Sa'adat*, Urdu translation by Muhammad Saeed ur-Rahman Alavi, Lahore, p. 31

<sup>234</sup> Refer to: *Makatib Tasawwuf*, Saharanpur, Vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>235</sup> Ghazali became known as "Hujjat al-Islam"—the Proof of Islam—because he stepped in as a reconciliatory thinker at a time when Islamic thought was in turmoil, splintered and confused. It was an era where scholars and jurists were quick to accuse each other of heresy, and each group—whether jurists, hadith scholars, pious believers, or Sufis—was convinced they alone were on the right path. Ghazali took it upon himself to interpret and present a version of Islam that could bring together these conflicting ideologies. His work *Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa* is a testament to this effort at synthesis. In his quest to create a more universally accepted version of Islam, Ghazali took on the task of reinterpreting the traditions that different Muslim groups used to label each other as heretics. Take, for instance, the hadith about the seventy-three sects. Ghazali argued that while only the saved sect (Firqa Najiyah) would avoid Hell, the other sects wouldn't be condemned to Hell forever. Instead, they'd be punished for a specific period, based on the severity of their sins. (Ghazali, *Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa*, edited by Suleiman Dunia, published 1381 AH, p. 203). Instead of outright criticizing the hadith that calls the Qadariyyah the "Magians of this nation," Ghazali chose a more cautious approach, merely noting that the Muslim community holds two different opinions on the matter, and that the real judgment can only be made by the ultimate authority—the one who is most knowledgeable and wise. (Ghazali, *Risala Imla' fi Mushkilat al-Ihya*, 1311 AH, printed in Egypt). Ghazali was also adamant that interpreting religious texts (ta'wil) shouldn't be the basis for labeling someone a disbeliever. He argued that even denying mass-transmitted reports (tawatur) isn't enough to declare someone a heretic, pointing out how difficult it is to prove tawatur for anything other than the Quran. He held a similar view when it came to consensus (ijma'). Ghazali made it his mission to bridge the divide between warring intellectual factions, pushing the idea that all who pray toward the Qibla are Muslims. At a time when these groups were practically thirsting

for each other's blood, people were naturally drawn to a voice preaching peace. It's said that his efforts led to a cooling of sectarian flames. The bitter rivalry between the Hanbalis and Ash'aris began to lose its edge, and by 502 AH, even the Sunnis and Shias managed to reach an agreement based on principles of coexistence. Ghazali's broad-mindedness toward non-Muslim communities also helped establish him as a moderate and widely accepted interpreter of Islam. Rather than passing judgment on who's destined for Heaven or Hell, like many jurists did, he deferred those decisions to the Day of Judgment. He went so far as to say, "I believe that most of the Christians of Rome and the Turks in our time will be included in God's mercy, if God wills." (*Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa*, op. cit., p. 204). This open-hearted approach made him a more palatable figure in the eyes of many.

Ghazali was the first to bring Sufism into the mainstream of Muslim thought, providing it with a solid theoretical foundation. Before him, Sufis existed, their writings and gatherings scattered here and there, but they weren't considered part of orthodox Islamic thought. However, when Ghazali sought to reconcile the outer and inner dimensions of Islamic jurisprudence, he crafted a new, supposedly more harmonious version of Islam. As a result, Sufi circles, like many other groups, began to be seen as integral to mainstream Muslim thought.

With Sufism gaining recognition as part of mainstream Muslim thought, a wave of activity swept through Sufi circles. Various sheikhs began organizing their work into orders and lineages, and with newfound public support, these Sufi leaders quickly became influential figures among the general Muslim population. Sayyid Ahmad al-Kabir al-Rifai, founder of the Rifai order and a contemporary of Ghazali, rose to such prominence that on significant occasions, like the night of the 15th of Sha'ban, up to 100,000 people would gather at his place. (*Shudhudh*, Vol. 4, p. 260).

Ibn Khallikan wrote about Sayyid al-Rifai, describing how his gatherings drew countless faqirs (spiritual mendicants), with arrangements made for their stay and meals. These spiritual retreats quickly turned into spectacles,

where groups of faqirs performed bizarre feats—some would swallow live snakes, others would leap into blazing ovens. Bonfires were lit, and they would dance around the flames until the fire died out. These gatherings became the epicenters of popular Islam, offering not just for the faqirs and the poor, but also for the idle and lazy, who found ample food and shelter there. And why wouldn't they? This version of Islam was far easier to follow than the more stringent interpretations. Sayyid Ahmad Kabir, the leader of the order, famously said, "سلكت كل الطرق الموصلة فما رأيت أقرب الأسهل إلا أصلح من الافتقار" —"I have followed all the paths that lead to spiritual realization, but I have not found any path easier, closer, or more fitting than the path of humility, neediness, and brokenness."

<sup>236</sup> Sarraj al-Tusi, a renowned Sufi scholar from the fourth century, finds it baffling that when it comes to verifying a hadith, people naturally turn to hadith scholars and not jurists. So why, he wonders, should anyone look beyond the Sufis when it comes to matters of spiritual ecstasy, the inheritance of mystical secrets, and the inner workings of the heart? In Sarraj's view, Sufis are the true authorities in these profound spiritual sciences. He argues that if people from other disciplines start meddling in these areas, it's like flirting with disaster. (*Kitab al-Luma'*, p. 54). In the introduction to *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya al-Kubra*, Abdul Wahab al-Sha'rani makes a bold argument: if the jurists—the Imams of Fiqh—can draw specific rulings from the broader principles of the Quran and Sunnah, deciding what's obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked, or forbidden, then why should it be surprising if the Sufi masters, who are equally knowledgeable in these texts, do the same? If a jurist has the right to make judgments on non-legislative matters through their reasoning, then why shouldn't the Sufi mystics—the Ahl al-Qalb—be granted that same authority? (*Tabaqat al-Sufiyya al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, p. 4).

As this idea took hold, people began to see Sufi texts as having the same authority as books of Islamic law, believing that the wisdom and insights collected by the Sufis were drawn from the same wellsprings as the jurists used to craft legal rulings. Sufism gained traction because the Sufis made

their case with more compelling arguments and vivid analogies than the jurists ever did. While the jurists claimed they were merely interpreting the Book of Guidance through the lens of tradition, resulting in legal manuals for the masses, the Sufis went further, asserting a direct link to prophecy through inspiration and spiritual discovery. This gave the impression that they were a continuation of living prophecy, without which religion would be reduced to a lifeless set of rules. For example, people said that the Sufis' practice of *chilla*—forty days of seclusion—echoes Prophet Moses' time on Mount Sinai, where he stayed for forty days. Some even argued that withdrawing from the world, embracing solitude, and deep meditation are necessary steps in spiritual growth, much like the Prophet Muhammad's retreat to the Cave of Hira. This led to the belief that the Sufis' claim of divine revelations being reflected upon their souls might hold some truth—after all, this has been the way of spiritual seekers for ages. Some scholars suggested that the Prophet Muhammad's experience in the Cave of Hira, where he heard a mysterious voice and was squeezed by the angel Gabriel until he thought he might die, parallels what the Sufis describe as *tawajjuh* (spiritual focus) and *habs-e-dam* (breath control). Scholars like Manazir Ahsan Gilani even proposed that the miraculous experiences of the Prophet's Mi'raj (ascension) and Isra (night journey) could, in some way, be echoed in the extraordinary spiritual journeys of the Sufis—perhaps his followers were granted glimpses of these divine experiences in their own unique way. (Manazir Ahsan Gilani, op. cit., p. 223).

<sup>237</sup> Abbas Afandi Mahmoud Al-Aqqad, *Al-Shudhudh*, 1915, Vol. 5, p. 328

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 327

<sup>239</sup> Refer to: Preface of *Ihya Ulum al-Din*

<sup>240</sup> Sufi orders that claim to trace their lineage back to early mystics or historical figures often don't have roots as deep as they suggest. The truth is, it was later followers who, long after these figures had passed, retroactively connected their orders to these revered personalities to establish legitimacy. Take Abdul Qadir Jilani, for instance. While his influence was vast during his lifetime, there's no evidence of any organized structure or spiritual order tied to him while he was alive. Even Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, who often writes

history more like a believer than a historian, admits that the Qadiri order's organizational structure only emerged about fifty years after the Sheikh's death. (*Tarikh Mashaikh Chisht*, Vol. 1, p. 162).

Before the third century, Sufism wasn't yet recognized as its own distinct school of thought. But as moral decay spread through Muslim society and the pursuit of religious knowledge became just another way to chase worldly gains, many sincere believers felt a deep unease. This discomfort was especially evident when hadith scholars seemed more interested in social status than in spiritual truth, or when jurists were focused on securing high-ranking positions within the government. In response, a group of spiritually inclined individuals not only criticized this intellectual decline but, disillusioned by the state of things, embraced an attitude that eventually evolved into a complete renunciation of the world and its attachments. In the first two centuries of Islam, there was no organized group promoting withdrawal from the world, nor any concerted effort encouraging people to renounce worldly life. However, among the many scholars, hadith experts, and jurists, there were a few individuals who, despite their deep knowledge of the Quran and Hadith and their potential to attain worldly positions, were guided by their piety to avoid the pursuit of fame and status. These were the ones whose conversations and gatherings radiated a deep connection with God, reminding others that not everyone had lost sight of the world as a fleeting existence. Meanwhile, political circumstances and factors often turned attempts at collective reform into internal conflicts and strife. From the martyrdom of Uthman to the tragedy of Husayn, and with the sporadic revolts by the Kharijites challenging the system, the sense grew that maybe it was time to embrace a more pacifist approach. This mindset began to dominate the gatherings of the devout in those early centuries, where the air was thick with a weariness of conflict and a yearning for a different path.

Starting in the third century, this pacifism began to take on a life of its own, gradually evolving into something distinct from the prevailing legal thought of the time. Over the years, its contours started to diverge noticeably. Yet, even in those early centuries, before the emergence of figures like Ibn Arabi, Sufism remained largely within the bounds of the Quranic framework.

Despite some excesses, Islamic pacifism was still rooted in the broader Islamic worldview. To truly grasp this phenomenon, we need to delve into the Sufi literature of those early centuries.

By the fourth century, Sufi terminology had firmly taken hold, and various Sufi groups were gaining recognition, though they were often regarded as a fringe, radical element within the broader Muslim community. Known for their use of theological debates and provocative methods that jolted the mind and soul, they created an aura of mystery and awe around them. Some viewed them as deeply devoted seekers of divine truth, immersed in a world of profound spiritual depth and insight. Yet, despite their growing mystique, they hadn't yet found a place in mainstream Islamic thought—a recognition that would only come later, thanks to Ghazali's efforts to bridge the gap.

During this time, the Sufis had a clear purpose: to guide the seeker to the final stage of *rida*—a state of complete contentment with God's will. Their focus was on experiencing profound spiritual states, glimpsing the unseen, and refining their inner selves through the purification of thought and a deep understanding of spiritual truths. They believed that the first step on this path, for those aspiring to mastery of the heart, was *muraqaba*—meditation. However, the elaborate concepts of the five or six spiritual descents (*tanzilat*) had not yet been developed, nor did they see themselves as divinely appointed figures based on various spiritual connections. That level of structure and self-perception would emerge later, as Sufism evolved and expanded.

<sup>241</sup> The early figures whom Sufis claim as their forebears didn't practice Sufism in the structured way it later came to be known. While their sayings and the miraculous events attributed to them are frequently quoted in Sufi literature, the formalized concept of Sufism wasn't yet in place during their time. Take figures like Habib al-Ajami, Fudayl ibn Iyad, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Shaiq al-Balkhi, Dhul-Nun al-Misri, Hatim al-Asamm, and Abdul Rahim Dairabi—they're considered early Sufis, and they certainly showed a distinct indifference to the world. But back then, the idea of renouncing the world hadn't yet crystallized into a formal philosophy of life. Harith al-Muhasibi was probably the first to systematically explore the idea of renouncing the

world. His books, rich with wisdom and written in a blend of stories and parables, combined the sharp insights of philosophers, the rigorous logic of theologians, and the narrative style of ancient Sufi tales. Reading his work felt like he was tapping into something raw and real, addressing truths that had been hiding in plain sight. It was as if every word was a wake-up call, urging readers to look deeper, to see what they had missed all along.

The stories, parables, and philosophy of renouncing the world offered a kind of solace to those who consciously shunned theological debates yet couldn't help but be intrigued by their nuances. In a time when continuous conquests were rapidly reshaping the Islamic world, with economic ideas shifting and prosperity becoming the norm, there was a growing fear that even those who prized poverty and detachment might be swept away by the flood of wealth. For those with sharp minds and sensitive souls, it was only natural to be drawn to writings that presented poverty and contentment not just as a lifestyle, but as a philosophy of life—one that had the power to shock, surprise, and provoke deep reflection.

Faqr and contentment—concepts that carried deep spiritual meaning, not just material poverty. But when these ideas began to be framed as a philosophy of renouncing the world, they were seen as something foreign to Islam. Imam Abu Zur'ah, a leading hadith scholar of his time, didn't hold back in his criticism. Even though he recognized the value in Harith's writings, he ultimately dismissed them as innovations and misguided thinking. (*Tarikh Baghdad* by Al-Khatib, Vol. 8, p. 215). He couldn't fathom why people were so moved by Muhasibi's books, finding deep lessons there, yet felt no such impact when reading the Book of Allah. Why had these musings on doubts and inner conflicts suddenly become so compelling? These ideas hadn't been part of religious thought until now. Abu Zur'ah ultimately concluded that this group of Sufis was straying from the true path, remarking, “هؤلاء قوم خالفوا اهل العلم”—“These are people who have opposed the scholars.”

<sup>242</sup> Despite Ghazali's towering scholarly reputation, the moral vision of Islam he championed didn't gain the acceptance he might have hoped for in his

time. His books met such resistance that fatwas were issued demanding their destruction. As recorded in *Shadharat al-Dhahab* by Ibn Imad, the Almoravid and Almohad rulers of the Maghreb issued a decree that any of Ghazali's works found within their territories should be burned. It's said that Qadi Iyad, the renowned judge of Granada, also issued a fatwa to burn Ghazali's writings. This speaks volumes about how Ghazali's interpretation of Islam—which would later be celebrated as orthodox and embraced by the majority of Muslims—was considered foreign, even unsettling, in his own time. Even thirty years after his death, when fatwas were still being issued to burn his books, his ideas were not widely accepted by the general Muslim population.



## Glossary

**Aamaal Qurani** (اعمال قرآنی): Refers to the practice of using Quranic verses and rituals with the intention of achieving specific outcomes, such as protection, healing, or fulfilling wishes. This practice often involves a blend of Islamic teachings with external influences and is seen as diverting the Quran from its intended role as a guide for life into a tool for supernatural purposes.

**Akhbar al-Akhyar** (أخبار الأخيار): A collection of stories and teachings of Sufi saints, compiled by Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlvi, showcasing the lives and spiritual experiences of these figures within the Sufi tradition.

**Alam al-Mithal** (عالم المثل): Refers to the World of Similitudes, a concept in Sufi thought where it is believed that spiritually attuned individuals can witness a higher realm, akin to the Prophet Muhammad's Mi'raj (ascension). This realm is thought to be accessible through specific spiritual practices, allowing saints to perceive divine truths and receive inspirations in a manner that is seen as parallel to prophetic revelations.

**Al-Buni** (البوني): Refers to Sheikh Abu al-Abbas Ahmed bin Ali al-Buni, an Islamic scholar renowned for his contributions to Sufism and occult sciences. He is best known for his book Shams al-Ma'arif al-Kubra, which delves into esoteric knowledge, particularly the science of letters and numbers within Islamic mysticism.

**Al-Qawl al-Jameel** (القول الجميل): A book by Shah Waliullah that explores various aspects of Sufi thought and practices. It is frequently referenced in discussions on Sufism and Islamic mysticism, offering insights into the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of the Sufi tradition.

**Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah** (التفهيمات الإلهية): A collection of mystical insights and divine understandings by Shah Waliullah, offering a deep exploration of spiritual knowledge and experiences within the Islamic tradition.

**Al-Wali** (الولي): A Quranic term meaning "friend of God," which Sufis reinterpret to refer to saints who have attained a special spiritual status. These individuals are believed to have a unique connection to the divine,

granting them spiritual authority to guide others and even intercede on behalf of the living after their death.

**Ana al-Haqq** (أنا الحق): "I am the Truth"; a famous statement attributed to the Sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj, expressing a profound mystical union with God. This declaration is often seen as controversial due to its implications of divinity, as it suggests an intimate identification with the divine essence.

**Asma al-Husna** (أسماء الحسنی): Refers to the "Beautiful Names" of Allah, the 99 names that describe God's attributes. While traditionally revered, some Sufi traditions have ascribed mystical powers to these names, believing that reciting them in specific ways can lead to divine intervention or influence over the physical world. This interpretation is critiqued as deviating from the Quran's message and potentially encouraging forms of shirk (associating partners with God).

**Awarif al-Ma'arif** (عوارف المعارف): A classic Sufi text by Sheikh Suhrawardi, which provides detailed guidance on the spiritual practices and the etiquette of Sufis, widely studied and respected within Sufi circles.

**Awliya' Allah** (أولياء الله): "Friends of God," a term used in Sufism to refer to saints who have attained a special closeness to God and are believed to possess spiritual powers or insights.

**Awraad and Wazaif** (أوراد و وظائف): Refers to specific prayers and invocations believed by Sufis to have been revealed outside of the Quran. These practices are regarded as powerful tools for achieving spiritual and worldly success, often claimed to be directly inspired by God or revealed to saints through dreams or visions.

**Ayat-e-Shifa** (آیات الشفاء): Refers to specific verses in the Quran that are believed to have healing properties for physical and spiritual ailments. The practice of using these verses as a form of spiritual medicine is critiqued for reducing the Quran to a manual for mystical remedies, rather than understanding it as a comprehensive source of guidance.

**Badi bilaa badi** (بادي بلا بادي): A phrase expressing the Sufi belief that God's essence is beyond human comprehension and remains hidden, even in its manifestations. It reflects the idea that while God's presence can be

perceived, His true nature remains elusive and beyond the grasp of human understanding.

**Baqa** (بقاء): A Sufi concept meaning "permanence" or "subsistence," referring to the state of remaining in the presence of God after the experience of annihilation (fana). It represents a continued spiritual existence in harmony with the divine.

**Baqa bi Allah** (بقاء بالله): Refers to the state of subsistence in God that follows the experience of Fana, where the individual, having annihilated the self, continues to exist in a state of divine presence and awareness, living in complete harmony with the divine will.

**Barzakh** (برزخ): An intermediate state or barrier between the physical world and the afterlife, often discussed in Islamic eschatology and Sufi mysticism. It represents a phase of existence where souls reside between death and the Day of Judgment.

**Batinī Khilāfah** (باطنی خلافت): Refers to the concept of a spiritual caliphate within Sufism, where a sheikh or spiritual leader assumes a role akin to that of a caliph, guiding the spiritual and moral lives of their followers. This concept is presented as an innovation not rooted in early Islamic teachings, shifting the focus from political and social reform to a spiritual hierarchy that claims to offer direct guarantees of salvation.

**Bay'ah** (بيعة): Traditionally an Islamic oath of allegiance given to a leader or ruler, Bay'ah has been reinterpreted in Sufism to mean an oath of spiritual allegiance to a sheikh. This practice is discussed as a means of establishing the sheikh's authority over followers, making their guidance a prerequisite for spiritual salvation. This reinterpretation is presented as a deviation from the original practice in early Islam.

**Chilla** (چله): A Sufi practice involving forty days of seclusion and intense spiritual discipline, often dedicated to deep meditation and spiritual exercises aimed at attaining greater spiritual awareness and closeness to God.

**Dalail al-Khayrat** (دلائل الخیرات): A popular Sufi text composed of prayers and supplications for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), widely recited for its

perceived blessings and spiritual benefits. It holds a significant place in Sufi devotional practices.

**Dhikr (ذكر):** The practice of remembering God through repetitive recitation of His names or Quranic phrases. In Sufism, Dhikr often takes on elaborate forms, which may include silent or loud recitations, sometimes accompanied by specific physical movements, as a means to achieve spiritual elevation and closeness to the divine.

**Du'a Ganj-ul-Arsh (دعاء گنج العرش):** A prayer believed to have appeared on the Throne of God and revealed by the angel Gabriel. This prayer is presented as an example of the many mystical prayers fabricated by Sufi orders, promising extraordinary spiritual rewards and solutions to worldly problems. Such practices are critiqued for often overshadowing the Quran itself in importance.

**Durood (درود):** Refers to the salutation and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad. Various forms of Durood, such as Durood Taj and Durood Akbar, are discussed as mystical prayers created by Sufis, believed to hold immense spiritual benefits. These practices are critiqued as fabrications that distract from the Quran's teachings, creating an illusion of spiritual benefits through ritualistic recitations.

**Esoteric Caliphate (خلافة باطنية):** Refers to the concept within Sufism where spiritual leaders or sheikhs claim a form of caliphate or spiritual authority that is separate from the traditional political and religious leadership in Islam. This concept is critiqued as a major shift away from the unity of the Muslim Ummah, leading to fragmentation and the rise of various Sufi orders. It is viewed as a deviation from the original Islamic teachings, where the role of the Imam al-Muslimin was central to maintaining the unity of the Muslim community.

**Esoteric Interpretation:** Esoteric interpretation refers to the practice of seeking hidden or mystical meanings in religious texts, particularly the Quran. This method of interpretation is heavily criticized in your book for allowing individuals to impose their own ideas onto the text, thereby distorting its original message.

**Fana (فناء):** Refers to the annihilation of the self in the presence of God. It is a key concept in Sufi thought, where the ultimate spiritual goal is to dissolve one's individual existence in order to merge with the divine essence.

**Fana fi al-fana (فناء الفناء):** Annihilation in annihilation; a Sufi term describing the state where a mystic becomes so absorbed in the divine presence that they lose all sense of individual existence, even beyond the awareness of this annihilation itself.

**Fana fi al-haq (فناء في الحق):** "Annihilation in the Truth"; a Sufi concept describing the dissolution of the self in the divine essence, which is often seen as the ultimate spiritual achievement in Sufism.

**Fana fi Allah (فناء في الله) and Fana fi al-Dhat (فناء في الذات):** These terms describe the Sufi concept of annihilation in God, where the individual self is completely dissolved in the divine essence. Fana fi Allah refers to the annihilation in God, while Fana fi al-Dhat refers to the annihilation in the divine essence or being. These concepts are critiqued for straying from orthodox Islamic teachings by prioritizing mystical experiences over clear divine revelation.

**Fana fi'l-sheikh (فناء في الشيخ):** Refers to the Sufi practice of complete spiritual surrender to a sheikh, where the disciple is expected to annihilate their own will in favor of the sheikh's guidance. This practice is critiqued as a deviation from Quranic principles of personal responsibility and direct accountability to God, instead promoting a form of spiritual authoritarianism.

**Faqr (فقر):** Literally means "poverty," but in Sufism, it refers to spiritual poverty or humility, where an individual acknowledges their complete dependence on God and detachment from worldly desires, embodying a state of inner surrender and devotion.

**Fariduddin Ganj Shakar (فریدالدین گنج شکر):** A renowned Sufi saint and founder of the Chishti order in South Asia, revered for his spiritual teachings and practices that have had a lasting influence on Sufi thought and tradition in the region.

**Fatiha (فاتحة):** Refers to the practice of reciting Surah Al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Quran, often as part of a ritual to send rewards to the deceased or to bless food at communal gatherings. This practice is critiqued for representing a shift from the Quran's intended use as a guide for living a meaningful life to a tool for ritualistic and superstitious practices.

**Fusus al-Hikam (فصوص الحكم):** A renowned mystical work by Ibn Arabi, considered a seminal text in Sufi philosophy. It delves into the wisdom of the prophets and the esoteric meanings behind their stories, offering insights into the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of Islamic teachings.

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**Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa (فصل التفريق بين الاسلام و الزندقة):** A work by Ghazali that seeks to distinguish between true Islamic belief and heretical innovations, defending orthodox Sunni doctrine by addressing theological controversies and clarifying the boundaries of Islamic faith.

**Futuh al-Makkiyah (الفتوحات المكية):** A well-known work by Ibn Arabi, which he claimed was revealed to him all at once. This claim exemplifies how Sufi writings are often presented as divinely inspired texts, elevating their status to that of revelation, and integrating mystical experiences into mainstream Islamic thought.

**Fuyud al-Haramayn (فيوض الحرمين):** A work by Shah Waliullah that discusses his spiritual experiences during his pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, offering insights into the spiritual significance of these sacred cities in his life and thought.

**Ghauth Azam (غوث اعظم):** A title often associated with Abdul Qadir Jilani, a revered figure in Sufism. This title is critiqued for the near-worship it engenders, as followers elevate such figures to a quasi-divine status, which is viewed as a corruption of Islamic monotheism.

**Ghawth** (غوث): Meaning "Helper" or "Succor," this term refers to a high-ranking Sufi saint believed to possess the power to provide spiritual and material assistance to those in need. This concept reflects the belief in the intercessory powers of such figures within the Sufi tradition.

**Grave Worship:** Refers to the practice of venerating and invoking the spirits of deceased saints at their graves, with the belief that these saints can intercede or influence the living world. This practice is traced back to non-Quranic beliefs about the immortality of the soul and its continued potency after death. It is critiqued as a form of shirk, seen as deviating from the monotheistic principles of Islam.

**Hadith Qudsi** (حديث قدسي): Refers to a special category of Hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad narrates a message from God that is not part of the Quran. This concept is discussed in the context of how Sufis have used Hadith Qudsi to justify their belief in ongoing divine communication, blurring the distinction between Quranic revelation and personal spiritual insights. This has contributed to a broader acceptance of supplementary forms of revelation within Islamic thought.

**Hama'at** (بمعات): A spiritual treatise by Shah Waliullah, which he described as a direct transmission from God, free from human intellect, reasoning, or scholarly debate. This claim reflects the Sufi belief in the legitimacy of their mystical insights as a source of religious knowledge, which they often regard as equal to or even surpassing traditional revelation.

**Haqeeqat-e-Muhammadi** (حقيقة محمدية): The Muhammadian Reality; a Sufi belief that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ embodies the primordial light from which all creation was derived. This light is considered the first manifestation of the divine and is viewed as the essence of all prophets, symbolizing a profound spiritual connection between the Prophet and the divine source of all existence.

**Hizb al-Bahr** (حزب البحر): A renowned prayer composed by the Sufi saint Abul-Hasan al-Shadhili, believed to offer spiritual protection and blessings. It is often recited for divine assistance in times of need.

**Hizb al-Bahr, Hizb al-Azam, Haft Haikal:** These terms refer to specific collections of prayers and invocations used in Sufi practices, believed to

provide protection, spiritual benefits, and solutions to worldly problems. These rituals are presented as examples of how Sufi mystics created and promoted practices that promise rewards and spiritual elevation, often overshadowing the Quran's role as the primary divine guide.

**Hujjatullah al-Baligha** (حجة الله البالغة): A significant work by Shah Waliullah that delves into Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and Sufi practices, aiming to reconcile and integrate various Islamic sciences into a cohesive understanding of the faith.

**Huroof-e-Sirri** (حروف سري): Refers to specific letters from the Quran that some Sufi mystics believed held hidden mystical powers. These letters were incorporated into rituals and practices aimed at spiritual healing or other supposed supernatural effects. This practice is critiqued as an alteration of the Quran's intended role, turning it into a tool for magical rituals rather than a source of divine guidance.

**Huruf al-Muqatta'at** (حروف مقطعات): These are the disjointed letters that appear at the beginning of some Surahs in the Quran. Sufi mystics attributed mystical and numerical significance to these letters, claiming they held secret powers. This belief is critiqued for leading to the perception of the Quran as a cryptic text rather than a straightforward guide, thereby distorting its original message.

**Hurufi Movement** (حروفي): A mystical and esoteric Islamic movement that emphasizes the significance of letters and their numerical values, believing that they contain hidden meanings within religious texts. This movement is associated with a symbolic and numerological approach to interpreting scripture, often diverging from mainstream Islamic teachings.

**Ibn Arabi** (ابن عربي): A highly influential Sufi mystic and philosopher known for his complex metaphysical ideas, particularly those related to Wahdat al-Wujud, the concept of the "unity of existence." He is often referred to as Sheikh al-Akbar, or "The Greatest Master," and his writings have had a profound impact on Sufi thought and Islamic mysticism.

**Ihya Ulum al-Din** (إحياء علوم الدين): A seminal work by Al-Ghazali, regarded as one of the most influential texts in Islamic spirituality and thought. This



comprehensive text covers a wide range of topics, blending traditional Islamic teachings with Sufi practices, and is considered a cornerstone in the study of Islamic ethics and spirituality.

**Ilham (الإلهام):** Refers to a form of inspiration or divine guidance claimed by Sufi masters as a source of religious insight. This concept is critiqued as an unverified, non-canonical source of religious knowledge that some Sufis have elevated to a status nearly equivalent to that of the Quran and Sunnah. Figures like Ahmad Sirhindi have asserted that Ilham could be considered a "third source" of Islamic guidance, a notion that is argued to be a dangerous deviation from orthodox Islam.

**Ilm al-Huruf (علم الحروف):** Refers to the study of the mystical significance of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, particularly as they appear in the Quran. Often associated with Sufism, this practice involves attributing numerical values and mystical properties to letters, with the belief that they hold secret powers. This practice is presented as an extension of foreign mystical traditions, like Kabbalah, leading to misunderstandings and misapplications of the Quran.

**Ilm al-Jafr (علم الجفر):** A supposed science of mystical interpretation and numerology attributed to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. This field involves assigning numerical values to letters and using these values to predict future events or uncover hidden meanings in the Quran. This practice is critiqued as a foreign influence that distorts the Quran's teachings.

**Ilm al-Mukashafa (علم المكاشفة):** Known as the "knowledge of mystical unveiling," this is considered a higher form of knowledge in Sufism, where truths are directly revealed to the mystic through spiritual experiences, bypassing ordinary intellectual understanding.

**Ilm Ladunni (علم لدني):** Refers to a form of divine, mystical knowledge believed to be granted directly by God to a select few. This esoteric knowledge is thought to exist beyond the conventional teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. This concept is critiqued as being promoted by Sufis to justify their mystical practices and teachings, which are viewed as distortions of the original Islamic message.

**Ilm Simiyah** (علم سيمياء): Refers to the so-called science of white magic or supernatural manipulation using Quranic verses, letters, and numbers. This practice is critiqued as a distortion of Islamic teachings, influenced by external traditions like Kabbalah, and is warned against for its potential to mislead and distort mainstream Islamic thought.

**Ilqa** (إلقاء): Refers to a type of inspiration or casting of divine knowledge into the hearts of saints, which Sufis believe is a direct communication from God. This concept is used to justify the Sufi practice of relying on personal spiritual insights as a source of religious authority, which is critiqued for potentially undermining the established sources of Islamic knowledge.

**Imam al-Muslimin** (إمام المسلمين): Refers to the leader or unifying figure of the Muslim community, traditionally holding both spiritual and temporal authority. This role is essential for maintaining the unity and guidance of the Muslim ummah.

**Imam Ghazali** (إمام غزالي): A prominent Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic, renowned for his profound contributions to Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, and spirituality. His works, particularly in integrating Sufi principles with mainstream Islamic teachings, have had a lasting impact on Islamic thought.

**Insan-e-Kamil** (إنسان كامل): The "Perfect Human," a concept in Sufism referring to an individual who has achieved spiritual perfection and reflects divine attributes. This figure is seen as embodying the highest potential of human spiritual development and is often viewed as the ideal model for spiritual growth.

**Ism-e-Azam** (اسم اعظم): The "Greatest Name" of Allah, believed by some to hold immense power and often invoked in prayers for specific needs. This concept is critically examined for how the belief in the mystical powers of God's names has been used to justify practices that may verge on shirk (associating partners with God), which contradicts the core message of the Quran.

**Istighfar** (استغفار): The act of seeking forgiveness from Allah, often recited as a prayer or supplication to purify the soul from sins. It is a common

practice in Islamic spirituality and Sufi traditions, emphasizing humility and repentance.

**Jadhb (جذب):** A Sufi term referring to spiritual absorption or attraction, where the seeker is drawn into a deep, overwhelming connection with the divine. It represents a profound state of spiritual experience and connection with God.

**Jihad-e-Akbar (جهاد اكبر):** Meaning "the greater jihad," this term is reinterpreted by Sufis to represent the internal spiritual struggle of annihilating the self (Fana fi Allah). This reinterpretation is viewed as a departure from the original Islamic concept of jihad, which traditionally refers to the struggle in the path of God, often understood in a more external, communal context.

**Jinn (جن):** Supernatural beings in Islamic belief, capable of influencing the physical world. Certain scholars and mystics have claimed the ability to control jinn through Quranic verses and mystical practices, which is presented as a departure from the Quran's teachings.

**Kabbalistic Influence:** Refers to the impact of Jewish mystical practices, particularly Kabbalah, on Islamic mysticism (Sufism). This influence is seen in the adoption of numerology, letter mysticism, and the belief in hidden powers within sacred texts. Such influences are suggested to have led to a misinterpretation of the Quran, turning it into a tool for magical practices rather than a guide for righteous living.

**Kashf (كشف), Ilqa (إلقاء), and Ilham (إلهام):** These are Sufi terms used to describe personal spiritual insights or revelations. Kashf means unveiling, Ilqa refers to inspiration, and Ilham denotes intuition. These concepts are critiqued for expanding the idea of divine revelation, blurring the lines between what is divinely revealed and what is personally experienced. This has led to a distorted understanding of revelation, diverging from the Quranic concept of Wahy (divine revelation).

**Kashf al-Mahjub (كشف المحجوب):** A classic Sufi text by Ali Hujwiri, also known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, that provides an introduction to Sufi thought and practice. It is one of the earliest and most influential works on Sufism, offering insights into the spiritual teachings and rituals of the Sufi tradition.

**Khanqah** (خانقاه): A Sufi lodge or retreat center where followers gather for spiritual instruction, Dhikr, and other Sufi practices. Khanqahs often serve as the central place for Sufi communities to live, practice together, and receive guidance from their spiritual leader or sheikh.

**Khidr** (الخبز): A mystical figure in Islamic tradition, often associated with spiritual wisdom and guidance. Sufi mystics have claimed direct spiritual lineage or authority from Khidr, bypassing traditional historical ties. This claim has been used by some Sufi leaders to establish their own spiritual authority and to justify the concept of an esoteric caliphate.

**Kitab al-Luma'** (كتاب اللمع): A foundational text in Sufism by Sarraj al-Tusi, which discusses the principles and practices of Sufism, including the inner experiences of mystics and their spiritual insights. It is one of the earliest comprehensive works on Sufi thought and serves as an essential reference for understanding the development of Sufi practices.

**Kun** (كُنْ): The word Kun means "Be," and is associated with God's creative command that brings things into existence. This term is discussed in the context of Sufi mysticism, where an intense focus on the power of this word led to practices involving letter worship. Sufis believed that Kun and other Quranic letters held hidden powers that could unlock divine secrets and influence the universe, a view critiqued as a deviation from the Quran's original purpose as a clear guide for life.

**Malak al-Ilham** (ملك الالهام): The Angel of Inspiration, a concept in Sufi thought where it is believed that certain divine messages are delivered directly to saints through this angel. These messages are claimed to be received in dreams or even in written form, and are often regarded with a reverence akin to that of revelation.

**Meem** (م): The Arabic letter "م" which holds mystical significance in Sufi practices. It is often associated with spiritual or esoteric meanings, and is sometimes used in rituals or meditative practices to invoke certain spiritual states or insights.

**Mi'raj** (معراج): Refers to the miraculous night journey of the Prophet Muhammad, where he is believed to have ascended to the heavens and

experienced divine revelations. This event holds profound spiritual significance in Islam, symbolizing the Prophet's direct encounter with the divine and serving as a source of inspiration for various mystical interpretations in Sufism.

**Moses and the Angel of Death:** Refers to a narrative within Sufi tradition where Moses is said to have challenged the angel of death, refusing to surrender his soul. This story is used in Sufi mysticism to illustrate the power and spiritual authority of prophets and saints. Such stories are critiqued as fanciful interpretations that stray from the Quran's teachings, emphasizing the importance of rational faith over mystical speculation.

**Muhaddath (محدث):** A Muhaddath is someone believed to receive divine inspiration or communication from God without being a prophet. This concept has been interpreted differently within Islamic traditions. While Sunni sources, like Sahih Bukhari, reject the idea that anyone can hold the status of a prophet or Muhaddath after the Prophet Muhammad, some Shia thought and mystical traditions have embraced the concept. This is critiqued for complicating the finality of prophethood and contributing to the proliferation of supplementary revelations.

**Muhkamat (محکمات):** Refers to the clear and decisive verses in the Quran, which are straightforward in meaning and form the foundational teachings of the book. These verses are considered the core principles that guide Islamic belief and practice.

**Mujaddid Alf Thani (مجدد الف ثاني):** The "Renewer of the Second Millennium," a title given to Ahmad Sirhindi, a prominent Sufi scholar who argued that, alongside the Quran and Sunnah, ilham (inspiration) should be regarded as a third source of religious authority. This idea contributed to the Sufi belief in supplementary revelation as a legitimate source of spiritual guidance, further embedding the concept within Islamic thought.

**Mujahada (مجاهدة):** Refers to spiritual exertion or struggle, often involving rigorous self-discipline and efforts to overcome the ego. It is a central practice in Sufi spirituality, believed to lead to higher spiritual states and closeness to God.

**Mukashafa** (مكاشفه): Refers to the unveiling or disclosure of divine truths. This practice is central to Sufi spirituality, where it is believed that through spiritual discipline and devotion, one can attain direct experiences of divine realities.

**Muraqaba** (مراقبة): A form of meditation in Sufism where the practitioner engages in deep contemplation and reflection on their relationship with God. It is often considered the first step on the path to inner purification and spiritual enlightenment.

**Musabba'at 'Ashr** (مسيحات عشر): A set of prayers that combine Quranic verses with additional supplications, believed to have been revealed to the Sufi saint Ibrahim al-Taymi through mystical inspiration. These prayers are recited for spiritual benefits and protection.

**Mushahada al-haq** (مشاهدة الحق): Refers to the realization or witnessing of the Truth, an advanced stage in Sufi spirituality where one perceives the ultimate reality or divine presence. This experience is considered a profound spiritual achievement.

**Mutashabihat** (متشابهات): Refers to allegorical or ambiguous verses in the Quran whose meanings are not immediately clear and are subject to different interpretations by scholars. These verses are often contrasted with the Muhkamat (clear and decisive verses) and are seen as a test of faith and understanding for believers.

**Mystical Interpretation of Bismillah** (بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم): Refers to the Sufi belief that the phrase "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim" ("In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful") holds mystical powers due to its letters and numerical values. Such beliefs are critiqued for leading to an improper understanding of the Quran, diverting attention from its intended purpose as divine guidance.

**Mystical Properties of Quranic Letters:** This concept involves the belief that certain letters in the Quran possess inherent mystical properties that can be unlocked through specific recitations or rituals. Sufis and other mystics have attributed various powers to these letters, claiming they can heal ailments, influence events, or provide spiritual insight. These beliefs are

challenged as distortions of the Quranic text, seen as rooted in superstition rather than authentic Islamic teachings.

**Noor-e-Mohammadi** (نور محمدی): Refers to the "Light of Muhammad," a concept in Islamic mysticism that describes the divine light believed to be the first thing created by God. This light is thought to have been passed down through the prophets and continues to illuminate the spiritual paths of saints, symbolizing the continuous presence of divine guidance in the world.

**Numerology** (علم الأعداد): The belief in the mystical significance of numbers and their influence on human life and events, often used in esoteric Islamic practices. This concept is explored in various mystical traditions, where numbers are thought to hold hidden meanings and powers.

**Numerology in Quranic Letters:** Refers to the study of the numerical values assigned to Quranic letters, a practice embraced by Sufis and other mystics who believed that these values could unlock divine secrets and influence reality. This practice, influenced by earlier Jewish and Hindu traditions, is critiqued as a departure from the Quran's core message of monotheism, focusing instead on speculative and superstitious interpretations.

**Qab Qawsayn** (قاب قوسين): Refers to the "two bows' length," a Quranic reference that Sufis interpret as the moment during the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Mi'raj (ascension) when he reached the closest proximity to God. This symbolizes the ultimate spiritual connection and is considered a pinnacle of mystical experience.

**Qaf** (ق): Refers to a letter in the Arabic alphabet that Sufi mystics believed held mystical significance due to its repetition in certain Quranic verses. The belief that reciting verses containing the letter Qaf could bring about miraculous benefits is critiqued as an example of how the Quran's text has been misinterpreted and used for superstitious practices.

**Qawari' al-Quran** (قوارع القرآن): Refers to specific verses of the Quran believed to possess extraordinary powers, such as warding off evil spirits, controlling jinn, or bringing about certain effects. The treatment of these verses as magical spells rather than as guidance for righteous living is critiqued for distorting the Quran's intended purpose.

**Quranic Rewards:** Refers to the concept of accumulating spiritual rewards through the recitation of the Quran, often quantified and linked to specific surahs or verses. This practice is critiqued for fostering a transactional approach to Quranic recitation, where the emphasis is on earning rewards rather than on understanding and implementing the Quran's teachings in daily life.

**Qutb (قطب):** A "Spiritual Axis," referring to a key figure in Sufism who is believed to be the spiritual leader of the world, guiding the cosmic order and often seen as a manifestation of divine qualities. The Qutb is considered to hold a central, stabilizing role in the spiritual hierarchy of the universe.

**Quwat al-Qulub (قوت القلوب):** A significant Sufi text authored by Abu Talib al-Makki, focusing on the spiritual practices and ethics of Islamic mysticism. It is an influential work that delves into the inner dimensions of faith and the moral conduct expected of those on the spiritual path.

**Recitation Rituals:** Refers to specific methods of reciting Quranic verses believed to produce supernatural effects, such as healing, protection, or fulfilling desires. These rituals often involve precise pronunciation, repetition, and the inclusion of additional phrases or supplications. These practices are critiqued as deviations from the Quran's intended purpose, promoting a transactional approach to spirituality rather than fostering genuine faith and understanding.

**Rijal al-Ghaib (رجال الغيب):** The "Hidden Men," mystical figures believed to possess supernatural powers and are often considered guardians of the spiritual realm. These figures are seen as operating in secret, influencing the world in alignment with divine will, and are central to certain Sufi beliefs about unseen spiritual hierarchies.

**Ruh (روح):** Often translated as "soul" or "spirit," this term in the Quran refers to divine revelation or the spirit of divine command. Sufi mystics have reinterpreted "Ruh" to include an ethereal life force or soul, influenced by Greek and Vedantic philosophies. This reinterpretation is critiqued as a distortion of the Quranic message, leading to misconceptions about the nature of the soul and spiritual life in Islam.



**Ruh al-Qudus (روح القدس):** Refers to the "Holy Spirit," a term used in the Quran to describe the angel Gabriel, who delivers divine revelation to the prophets. In Sufi mysticism, this term has been expanded to represent a spiritual force or presence that can be invoked for mystical experiences. This broader interpretation is critiqued as a departure from the Quranic meaning, which is more straightforward and directly linked to the act of revelation.

**Ruh-e-Mohammadi (روح محمدي):** The "Spirit of Muhammad," believed to be the spiritual essence that sustains the cosmic order, connecting all Qutbs and saints to the original light of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is considered the driving force behind the spiritual authority of mystics and saints, symbolizing a deep, ongoing connection to the prophetic spirit.

**Salat al-Ghawthiya (صلاة الغوثية):** A special prayer in Sufism that seeks the intercession or assistance of a revered saint or spiritual figure. This prayer is often recited in times of distress or when seeking spiritual support from those believed to possess divine favor.

**Salat al-Hajat (صلاة الحاجة):** A prayer performed when seeking assistance from God for a particular need or difficulty. This prayer is a way for believers to express their dependence on divine help in overcoming challenges or fulfilling specific desires.

**Salat al-Istikhara (صلاة الاستخارة):** A prayer seeking guidance from God when faced with difficult decisions. It is a means of asking for clarity and divine assistance in choosing the right path, with the belief that God will guide the individual toward what is best.

**Salat al-Khawf (صلاة الخوف):** A special prayer performed in times of fear or danger, particularly in battlefield situations or under extreme stress. This prayer allows for flexibility in its performance, acknowledging the unique circumstances of such moments while maintaining a connection with God.

**Salat al-Tasbih (صلاة التسبيح):** A special prayer involving the repeated recitation of specific phrases that glorify God. It is believed to bring about forgiveness and spiritual benefits, offering a way for believers to deepen their devotion and seek divine mercy.

**Salatul Makoos and Salat Ghausia:** These terms refer to specific prayers and spiritual exercises within Sufism. These practices are critiqued as part of the ritualistic and mystical innovations introduced by Sufi traditions, which are seen as distortions of the original message of Islam, shifting the focus from the Quran's teachings to elaborate rituals.

**Sama (سماع):** "Spiritual listening," a Sufi practice involving music, poetry, and dance, intended to facilitate a mystical experience or union with the divine. Through these artistic expressions, participants seek to transcend the physical world and connect with spiritual truths.

**Sawaqat Surah Al-Fatihah (سواقط سورة فاتحه):** Refers to the "fallen letters" or missing letters from Surah Al-Fatihah. In Sufi tradition, these letters were believed to have mystical significance and were thought to bring about punishment or misfortune if used in certain ways. This belief is critiqued as part of a larger trend of attributing mystical powers to Quranic letters, which is seen as a misdirection from the Quran's true teachings.

**Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (شهاب الدين السهروردي):** A prominent Sufi scholar who played a key role in formalizing the Sufi path and the concept of spiritual authority. His teachings, particularly in *Awarif al-Ma'arif*, laid the groundwork for the institutionalization of Sufi orders and the spiritual hierarchy within them. His role in promoting the idea of *fana fi'l-sheikh* (annihilation in the sheikh) and the elevation of the sheikh's authority to a near-prophetic status is critiqued for potentially distorting the traditional understanding of spiritual guidance in Islam.

**Shah-e-Wilayat (شاه ولايت):** "King of Sainthood," a title attributed to Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, within Sufi tradition. This title symbolizes the high status of sainthood and spiritual authority in Sufism. It has been used by various Sufi orders to trace their spiritual lineage back to Ali, thereby legitimizing their claims to spiritual authority.

**Shaikh al-Akbar (شيخ الاكبر):** "The Greatest Master," a title attributed to Ibn Arabi, a highly influential Sufi mystic. His teachings, particularly his concept of "unity of being" (*Wahdat al-Wujud*), are critiqued for representing a significant departure from the core teachings of Islam, blending mysticism with metaphysical interpretations that some view as controversial.

**Shath** (شطحات): "Ecstatic Utterance," refers to statements made by Sufis in a state of spiritual ecstasy that may seem heretical or blasphemous but are considered by their followers as expressions of deep mystical experience. These utterances are often controversial, as they challenge conventional religious boundaries and are seen by some as spontaneous revelations of divine truth.

**Shirk** (شرك): Refers to the act of associating partners with God, considered one of the gravest sins in Islam. Practices such as grave worship, invoking the spirits of deceased saints, and attributing supernatural powers to them are criticized as forms of shirk. These practices are rooted in non-Quranic beliefs, influenced by Vedantic traditions, that suggest souls never truly die and can intercede on behalf of the living.

**Siyar al-Awliya** (سير الاولياء): A classical Islamic text that details the lives, teachings, and spiritual practices of various Sufi saints and mystics. It serves as a significant source of historical and spiritual insight into the development of Sufism.

**Sufi Qurans:** Refers to the texts and teachings of prominent Sufis that are treated as alternative or supplementary scriptures to the Quran. These writings are presented as containing hidden meanings and esoteric knowledge, which Sufis claim to be divinely inspired. This practice is criticized for undermining the authority and clarity of the Quran.

**Surah Al-Fatihah** (سورة الفاتحة): The opening chapter of the Quran, often referred to as "The Opening." The text discusses how some mystics have altered the way Surah Al-Fatihah is recited, adding their own phrases or changing the recitation method to supposedly harness its spiritual power for healing or fulfilling desires. These practices are critiqued as distortions that disrespect the sanctity and original purpose of the Quran.

**Surah Yasin** (سورة يس): The 36th chapter of the Quran, often regarded with special reverence in Islamic tradition. It is mentioned how figures like Sheikh Abu al-Abbas al-Buni created specific recitation rituals for Surah Yasin, claiming these practices could fulfill personal needs. Such rituals are critiqued for transforming the Quran into a tool for personal gain rather

than adhering to its intended purpose as a guide for spiritual and moral living.

**Ta'wil** (تأويل): Refers to the interpretation or allegorical explanation of religious texts, particularly the deeper, hidden meanings of the Quran. It involves seeking out the esoteric or symbolic understanding of Quranic verses, beyond their apparent meanings.

**Tafhimat Ilahiyyah** (تفهيمات إلهية): A work by Shah Waliullah, exploring divine inspirations and their interpretations within Islamic thought. The text delves into the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of divine knowledge, offering insights into the nature of inspiration and revelation.

**Talismans and Amulets in Sufi Practice:** Objects inscribed with Quranic verses, letters, or mystical symbols, believed to hold protective or healing powers. These items are used in rituals that blend Islamic teachings with superstitions and foreign mystical practices. Such practices are critiqued as distortions of Islamic monotheism, rooted in pre-Islamic and foreign traditions rather than authentic Quranic guidance.

**Talismans and Grids in Sufi Practice:** Refers to the use of Quranic verses, letters, and numerical grids in amulets and talismans believed to hold mystical powers. These practices, influenced by Sufi interpretations, are presented as deviations from the Quran's intended role as a guide for spiritual and moral conduct, instead turning it into a tool for magical practices.

**Tanzilat-e-Sitta** (تنزیلات سته): The "Six Descents," a concept in Sufi metaphysics that outlines the stages through which divine presence descends into the world, with Haqiqat-e-Mohammadiya being the first and most significant descent. This framework is used to explain the process of divine manifestation in the material realm.

**Tasawwuf** (تصوف): Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, focusing on the inward search for God and the cultivation of spiritual experiences through practices like meditation, recitation, and asceticism. It emphasizes personal spiritual development and the pursuit of inner purity.

**Tawajjuh** (توجه): A Sufi practice of directing one's spiritual focus and concentration towards God or a spiritual guide. It involves deep

contemplation and the cultivation of a spiritual connection, often under the guidance of a Sufi master.

**Tawakkul** (توكل): Refers to trust and reliance on God. In Sufi practice, this concept is often taken to an extreme level, emphasizing complete surrender and dependence on divine will, leaving all worldly concerns in the hands of God.

**Tazkiyah** (تزكية): Spiritual purification or cleansing of the soul, a core practice in Sufi spirituality aimed at achieving moral and spiritual purity. This process involves ridding oneself of negative traits and cultivating virtues to attain closeness to God.

**Ulama' al-rasikhun** (علماء الراسخون): Refers to scholars who are firmly grounded with deep and well-established knowledge in Islamic teachings. These scholars are often considered capable of interpreting the more obscure aspects of Islamic doctrine and providing guidance on complex religious matters.

**Ulul Amr** (أولي الأمر): A Quranic term traditionally interpreted to mean those in authority, often understood as referring to religious leaders or scholars. This term has been reinterpreted by some scholars and Sufis to justify a hierarchical religious structure that elevates them to positions of unchallengeable authority. It is critiqued for being used to reinforce the idea that obedience to these leaders is akin to obedience to God, a concept argued to be a distortion of the Quran's original intent.

**Usul al-Kafi** (اصول الكافي): A foundational Shia Hadith collection compiled by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, widely respected in Shia Islam for its comprehensive coverage of Shia beliefs and practices. It is one of the most significant texts in Shia theology and jurisprudence.

**Uswah** (أسوة): Meaning "exemplary model," this term is used in Islamic discourse to refer to the Prophet Muhammad's life and conduct. It is contrasted with the practices of Sufi mystics, suggesting that some have replaced the Uswah of the Prophet with their own mystical interpretations and practices, diverting from the Prophet's example.

**Wafq** (وفق): A type of magical square or talisman used in Islamic occult practices, believed to have spiritual or protective powers. These squares are often inscribed with Quranic verses, names of God, or mystical symbols and are used in rituals aimed at bringing about specific outcomes or protection.

**Wahdat al-Shuhud** (وحدت الشهود): "Unity of Witnessing," a concept in Sufi thought that contrasts with Wahdat al-Wujud. It suggests that while God is witnessed in all things, there remains a clear distinction between the Creator and the creation. This perspective maintains the separation between God and the universe, emphasizing that creation is a reflection or manifestation of God's attributes, but not identical to God.

**Wahdat al-Wujud** (وحدة الوجود): Literally "the unity of existence," this Sufi philosophy posits that all existence is essentially one and that everything in the universe is a manifestation of the divine. This concept suggests an intrinsic unity between God and His creation, which is seen as a form of divine presence. However, it stands in contrast to the strict monotheism emphasized in the Quran, which asserts the distinctness and transcendence of God from His creation.

**Wahy Matlu** (وحي متلو) and **Wahy Ghayr Matlu** (وحي غير متلو): Wahy Matlu refers to the recited form of revelation, such as the Quran, which is considered the direct word of God. Wahy Ghayr Matlu refers to non-recited forms of revelation, including Hadith Qudsi, which are divine messages conveyed through the Prophet Muhammad but not part of the Quran. The division of revelation into these categories is critiqued for potentially undermining the Quran's unique status as the final and complete revelation. This division has facilitated the acceptance of supplementary texts and mystical insights, which can distort the original understanding of revelation.

**Wali** (ولي): In the Quran, wali refers to a protector, helper, or guardian, particularly in the context of one's relationship with God, signifying those who are aligned with Allah's guidance and protection. In Sufism, wali takes on a more mystical meaning, referring to a saint or spiritual guide with a special connection to the divine. This role is believed to extend beyond death, with the souls of these saints continuing to influence the living. Sufis believe that these saints have unique access to divine knowledge and can

serve as intermediaries between God and the faithful, often claimed to possess spiritual powers even after death.

**Wasilah** (وسيلة): Refers to a means or intermediary used to seek God's favor, often through prayer or acts of devotion. In Sufism, wasilah is specifically understood as the intercession by saints or spiritual guides, who are believed to help the seeker attain closeness to God through their spiritual influence.

**Wazifa** (وظيفة): A prescribed set of recitations or supplications in Sufism, believed to possess spiritual power or bring about specific blessings when performed regularly. These practices are often integrated into daily spiritual routines as a means of seeking divine favor and protection.

**Wilayah** (ولاية): In the Quran, wilayah refers to guardianship and authority, particularly the divine authority over believers and the relationship between believers and non-believers. In Sufism, wilayah is often seen as a spiritual rank or state granted to a select few who have reached a high level of piety and closeness to God, signifying a special relationship with the divine.

**Zahir and Batin** (ظاهر و باطن): These terms refer to the outer (Zahir) and inner (Batin) meanings of the Quran. Sufis claim that the Quran contains both an outward, literal meaning and a hidden, mystical meaning that can only be truly understood by those with deep spiritual insight. This dual interpretation is critiqued for allowing individuals to mold Quranic verses to fit their own spiritual and philosophical beliefs, which is seen as a manipulation of the divine message.

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